Madge Morton's Victory

THE MADGE MORTON BOOKS

Barbara Flegal
524 South Second Street
Clearfield, Pennsylvania

Before the Hand Organ Danced a Little Figure.

Frontispiece.

Madge Morton's Victory

By

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THE SAALFIELD PUBLISHING COMPANY
Akron, Ohio New York

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CHAPTER I

COMMENCEMENT DAY AT MISS TOLLIVER'S

"O PHIL, dear! It is anything but fair. If you only knew how I hate to have to do it!" exclaimed Madge Morton impulsively, throwing her arms about her chum's neck and burying her red-brown head in the soft, white folds of Phyllis Alden's graduation gown. "No one in our class wishes me to be the valedictorian. You know you are the most popular girl in our school. Yet here I am the one chosen to stand up before everyone and read my stupid essay when your average was just exactly as high as mine."

Madge Morton and Phyllis Alden were alone in their own room at the end of the dormitory of Miss Matilda Tolliver's Select School for Girls, at Harborpoint, one morning late in May. Through the halls one could hear occasional bursts of girlish laughter, and the murmur of voices betokened unusual excitement.

It was the morning of the annual spring commencement.

Phyllis slowly unclasped Madge's arms from about her neck and gazed at her companion steadfastly, a flush on her usually pale cheeks.

"If you say another word about that old valedictory, I shall never forgive you!" she declared vehemently. "You know that Miss Tolliver is going to announce to the audience that our averages were the same. You were chosen to deliver the valedictory because you can make a speech so much better than I. What is the use of bringing up this subject now, just a few minutes before our commencement begins? You know how often we have talked this over before, and that I told Miss Matilda that I wished you to be the valedictorian instead of me, even before she selected you."

Phil's earnest black eyes looked sternly into Madge's troubled blue ones. "If you begin worrying about that now, you won't be able to read your essay half as well," declared Phil impatiently. "Please sit still for a minute and wait until Miss Jenny Ann calls us."

Phil pushed Madge gently toward the big armchair. Then she walked over to stand by the window, in order to watch the carriages drive up to Miss Tolliver's door and to keep her back turned directly upon her friend Madge.

The little captain sat very still for a few minutes. She had on an exquisite white organdie gown, a white sash, white slippers and white silk stockings. In the knot of sunny curled hair drawn high upon her head she wore a single white rose. A bunch of roses lay in her lap, also a manuscript in Madge's slightly vertical handwriting, which she fingered restlessly.

The silence grew monotonous to Madge.

"Are you angry with me, Phil?" she asked forlornly.

Madge and Phyllis Alden had been best friends for four years, and had never had a real disagreement until this morning.

Phyllis was too honest to be deceitful. "I am a little cross," she admitted without turning around. "I wish Lillian and Eleanor would come upstairs to tell us how many people have arrived for the commencement."

Madge started across the room toward Phil. But Phyllis's back was uncompromising. She pretended not to hear her friend's light step. Suddenly Madge's expression changed. The color rose to her face and her eyes flashed.

"I won't apologize to you, Phil," she said. "I had intended to, but I see no reason why I should not say it is unfair for me to be the valedictorian when you have the same claim to it that I have. It is hateful in you not to under-

stand how I feel about it. I am going to find Miss Jenny Ann." Madge's voice broke.

A knock on the door interrupted the two girls. Madge opened the door to a boy, who handed her a small parcel addressed in a curious handwriting to "Miss Madge Morton." The letters were printed, but the writing did not look like a child's. It was the fiftieth graduating gift that she had received. Phil's number had already reached the half-hundred mark.

Madge dropped her newest package on the bed without opening it. She was half-way out in the hall when Phyllis pulled her back.

"Look me straight in the face," ordered Phil. Madge obeyed, the flash in her eyes fading swiftly. "Now, see here, dear," argued Phyllis, "suppose that Miss Matilda had chosen me to deliver the valedictory instead of you, wouldn't you have been glad?"

Madge nodded happily. "I should say I would," she murmured fervently.

Phyllis laughed, then leaned over and kissed her friend triumphantly.

"There, you have said just what I wanted to make you say," went on Phil. "You say you would be glad if Miss Tolliver had chosen me for the valedictorian instead of you. Why can't you let me have the same feeling about you? Please, please understand, Madge, dear"—the

tears started to Phil's eyes—"that no one has been unfair to me because you were Miss Matilda's choice."

Madge glanced nervously at the little gold clock on their mantel shelf. "It is nearly time for the entertainment to begin, isn't it?" she inquired. "I suppose Miss Jenny Ann will call us in time. What a lot of noise the girls are making in the hall!"

She idly untied her latest graduating gift. It was a small box, made after a fashion of long years ago, and its tops and sides were encrusted with tiny shells. On one side of the box the word "Madge" was worked out in tiny shells as clear and beautiful as jewels. Inside the box, on a piece of cotton, was a single, wonderful pearl. It was unset, but the two girls realized that it was rarely beautiful. There was no name in the box, no card to show from whom it came.

Madge turned the box upside down and peered inside of it. "I don't know who could have sent this to me," she declared, in a puzzled fashion. "Mrs. Curtis is the only rich person I know in the whole world, and she has already given us her presents. I must show this to Uncle and Aunt. I am afraid they won't wish me to keep it. But I don't know how we are ever going to return it to the giver when he or she is anonymous."

"Isn't that Miss Jenny Ann calling?" Madge turned pale with the excitement of the coming hour and thrust the gift under her pillow.

Phyllis picked up a great bunch of red roses. The eventful moment had arrived. The graduating exercises at Miss Matilda Tolliver's were about to begin!

Neither of the two girls knew how they walked up on the stage. Before them swam "a sea of upturned faces." It was impossible to tell one person from another. When Madge and Phil overcame their fright they discovered that they were among the twelve girl graduates, who formed a white semi-circle about the stage, and that Miss Matilda Tolliver was making an address of welcome to the audience.

Phyllis had no dreaded speech ahead of her. She looked out over the audience and saw her father and mother, Dr. and Mrs. Alden; and Madge's uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Butler; but Madge could think of nothing save the terrifying fact that she must soon deliver her valedictory.

"Madge," whispered Phil softly, "don't look so frightened. You know you have made speeches before and have acted before people. I am not a bit afraid you will fail. See if you can find Mrs. Curtis and Tom. There they are, smiling at us from behind Eleanor and Lillian."

Readers of "Madge Morton, Captain of the 'Merry Maid'," will remember the delightful fashion in which Madge Morton, Eleanor Butler, Lillian Seldon and Phyllis Alden spent a summer on a houseboat, which they evolved from an old canal boat and named the "Merry Maid."

How they anchored at quiet spots along Chesapeake Bay, made the acquaintance of Mrs. Curtis, a wealthy widow, and what came of the friendship that sprang up between her and Madge Morton made a story well worth the telling.

In "Madge Morton's Secret" the scene of their second houseboat adventure found them at Old Point Comfort, where, as Mrs. Curtis's guests, they partook of the social side of the Army and Navy life to be found there. The origin of Captain Madge's secret, and of how she kept it in spite of the humiliation and sorrow it entailed, the mysterious way in which the "Merry Maid" slipped her cable and drifted through heavy seas to a deserted island, where her crew lived the lives of girl Crusoes for many weeks, form a narrative of lively interest.

In "Madge Morton's Trust" the further adventures of the "Merry Maid" were fully related. For the sake of the trip the happy houseboat girls saddled themselves with Miss Betsey

Taylor, a crotchety spinster, who was troubled with nerves, and who offered to pay liberally for her passage on their cosy "Ship of Dreams."

Madge's faith and unshakable trust in David Brewster, a poor young man who did the work on Tom Curtis's yacht, which made the trip with the "Merry Maid," her championing of David when suspicion pointed darkly toward him as a thief, and her unswerving loyalty to the unhappy youth until his innocence was established, revealed the little captain in the light of a staunch true comrade and doubly endeared her to all her companions.

Madge heard Miss Matilda Tolliver announce that the valedictory would be delivered by Miss Madge Morton. Phyllis gave her companion a little nudge, and somehow Madge arrived at the front of the stage and stood under a huge arch of flowers. Just above her head swung a great bell. Everyone was smiling at her. Madge was seized with a dreadful case of stage fright. Her tongue felt dry and parched. She tried to speak, but no sound came forth.

Mrs. Curtis's lovely face, with its crown of soft, white hair, smiled encouragingly at her. Tom was crimson with embarrassment. Lillian and Eleanor held each other's hands. Would Madge never begin her valedictory?

She tried again. No one heard her except her friends and teachers on the stage. Her voice was no louder than a faint whisper.

Miss Tolliver leaned over. "Madge, speak more distinctly," she ordered.

Then the little captain realized that the most humiliating moment of her whole life had arrived. She had been selected as the valedictorian of her class, she had been chosen above her beloved Phil because of her gift as a speaker, yet she would be obliged to return to her seat without having delivered a line of her address. She would be disgraced forever!

Madge's knees shook. Her lips trembled. Tears swam mistily in her eyes. She was a lovely picture despite her fright.

At eighteen she was in the first glory of her youth, a tall, slender girl, with a curious warmth and glow of life. Her lips were deeply crimson, her hair a soft brown, with red and gold lights in it, and her eyes were full of the eagerness that foreshadows both happiness and pain.

Phil and Miss Jenny Ann were exchanging glances of despair—Madge had broken down, there was no hope for her. Suddenly her face broke into one of its sunniest smiles. She lifted her head. Without glancing at the paper she held in her hand she began her address in a clear, penetrating voice.

CHAPTER II

HOW IT WAS ALL ARRANGED

MADGE'S valedictory address was almost over. She had spoken of "Friendship," what it meant to a girl at school and what it must mean to a woman when the larger and more important difficulties come into her life. "Schoolgirl friendships are of no small consequence," declaimed Madge; "the friendships made in youth are the truest, after all!"

Phil listened to her chum's voice, her eyes misty with tears. Only a half-hour before she and her beloved Madge had come very near to having the first real quarrel of their lives. Phil turned her gaze from Madge to glance idly at the arch of flowers above her friend's head. Phil supposed that she must be dizzy from the heat of the room, or else that she could not see distinctly because of her tears; the arch seemed to be swaying lightly from side to side, as though it were blown by the wind. Yet the room was perfectly still. Phil looked again. She must be wrong. The arch was built of a framework of wood. It was heavy and she did not believe it would easily topple down.

Madge was happily unconscious of the wobbling arch. A few more lines and her speech would be ended! There was unbroken silence in the roomy chapel of the girls' school, where the commencement exercises were being held. Suddenly some one in the back part of the room jumped to his feet. A hoarse voice shouted, "Madge!"

Madge started in amazement. Her manuscript dropped to the ground. Every face but hers blanched with terror. The swaying arch was now visible to other people besides Phil. Tom leaped to his feet, but he was tightly wedged in between rows of women. Phil Alden made a forward spring just as the arch tumbled. She was not in time to save Madge, but some one else had saved her; for, before Phil could reach the front of the stage, Madge's name had been called again. Although the voice was an unknown one, Madge instinctively obeyed it. She made a little movement, leaning out to see who had summoned her, and the arch crashed down just at her back.

The quick cry from the audience frightened Madge, whose face was turned away from the wreck. She swung around without discovering her rescuer. Some one had fallen on the stage. Phyllis Alden had reached her friend's side, not in time to save her, but to receive, herself, a

heavy blow from the great bell that was suspended from the arch.

Madge dropped on the stage at Phil's side, forgetting her speech and the presence of strangers.

Miss Tolliver and Miss Jenny Ann lifted Phyllis before Dr. Alden had had time to reach the stage. There was a dark bruise over Phil's forehead. In a moment she opened her eyes and smiled. "I am not a bit hurt, Miss Matilda; *do* let the exercises go on," she begged faintly. "Let Madge and me go up to the front of the stage and bow, Miss Matilda. Then I can show people that I am all right. We must not spoil our commencement in this way."

Miss Matilda agreed to this, and Madge and Phyllis went forward to the center of the stage. A storm of applause greeted them. Madge and Phil were a little overcome at the ovation. Madge supposed that they were being applauded because of Phil's heroism, and Phil presumed that the demonstration was meant for Madge's valedictory, therefore neither girl knew just what to do.

It was then that Miss Matilda Tolliver came forward. She was usually a very severe and imposing looking person. Most of her pupils were dreadfully afraid of her. But the accident that had so nearly injured her two favorite gradu-

ates had completely upset her nerves. Instead of making a formal speech, as she had planned to do, she stepped between the two girls, taking a hand of each. "I had meant to introduce Miss Alden a little later on to our friends at the commencement exercises," announced Miss Tolliver, "but I believe I would rather do it now. I wish to state that, although Miss Morton has delivered the valedictory, Miss Phyllis Alden's average during the four years she has spent at my preparatory school has been equally high. It was her wish that Miss Morton should be chosen to deliver the valedictory. But Miss Alden's friends have another honor which they wish to bestow upon her. She has been voted, without her knowledge, the most popular girl in my school. Her fellow students have asked me to present her with this pin as a mark of their affection."

Miss Matilda leaned over, and before Phil could grasp what was happening had pinned in the soft folds of her organdie gown the class pin, which was usually an enameled shield with a crown of laurel above it; but the center of Phil's shield was formed of small rubies and the crown of tiny diamonds.

Phyllis turned scarlet with embarrassment, but Madge's eyes sparkled with delight. She was no longer ashamed of having been chosen

as valedictorian. In spite of herself, Phyllis Alden was the star of their commencement.

It was not until the four girls were seated with their dear ones about a round luncheon table in the largest hotel in Harborpoint that Madge suddenly recalled the stranger whose warning cry had probably saved her from a serious hurt.

Mrs. Curtis and Tom were entertaining in honor of Madge and Phyllis. There were no other guests except the two houseboat girls, Eleanor and Lillian, Dr. and Mrs. Alden, and Mr. and Mrs. Butler.

Madge sat next to Tom Curtis, and during the progress of the luncheon managed to say softly: "Did you see who it was that called my name so strangely this morning, Tom? I was so frightened at having to deliver my valedictory that when I heard that sudden shout, 'Madge!' I was too much confused to recognize the voice."

Tom shook his head. "I don't know who it was. I heard the voice but couldn't discover its owner. It must have been some one at the very back of the room, for no one in the audience seems to know who called out to you."

"I suppose I'll never know," sighed Madge. "It is a real commencement day mystery, isn't it?"

Tom nodded smilingly. "By the way, Madge,

where are the houseboat girls going to spend the summer after you come to Madeleine's wedding?" he asked. "You must be tired after your winter's work."

Madge shook her head soberly. "We are not going to be on the houseboat this year," she whispered. "Going to New York to be bridesmaids is about as much as four girls can arrange. We haven't even dared to think of the houseboat."

"I have," interposed Phyllis, who had heard the remark and the reply, "but we don't wish our families to know. You see, Madge and I are hoping and planning to go to college next winter, so, of course, we can't afford another summer holiday," she ended under her breath.

"What's that, Phil?" inquired Dr. Alden from the other end of the table.

Phil blushed. "Nothing important, Father," she answered.

"Oh, then I must have been mistaken," replied Dr. Alden, "for I thought I caught the magic word, 'houseboat.' No one of you girls has ever spoken of the 'Merry Maid' as unimportant."

A cloud instantaneously overspread five faces about the luncheon table. Neither Mrs. Curtis nor Dr. Alden realized that in mentioning the houseboat they had forced the houseboat pas-

sengers to break a vow of silence. Only the day before the five of them had met in Miss Jenny Ann Jones's room. There they had solemnly pledged themselves that, since it was impossible for them to have this year's vacation aboard the "Merry Maid," they would bear the sorrow in silence. This time there was no "Miss Betsey" to pay the expenses of the trip. The girls and Miss Jenny Ann hadn't a dollar to spare. The cost of going to Madeleine Curtis's New York wedding was appalling to all of the girls except Lillian, whose parents were in affluent circumstances. But, of course, Madeleine was almost a houseboat girl herself. Readers of the first houseboat story will recall how Madeleine's fiancé, Judge Hilliard, rescued Madge and Phyllis from a serious situation and saved Madeleine from a far worse plight than that in which he found the two girls.

"Mrs. Curtis," remarked Dr. Alden in the midst of the mournful silence, "Mr. and Mrs. Butler, my wife and I have just been talking things over. We have decided that it would be a good thing for our girls to spend several weeks on board their houseboat. But, of course, if they have decided differently——"

It was a good thing that Mrs. Curtis was not giving a formal luncheon. A united shriek of delight suddenly arose from four throats.

Madge sprang from the table to hug her uncle, Eleanor blew kisses to her mother from across the room, Lillian clapped both hands, and Miss Jenny Ann smiled rapturously.

Phil's face was the only serious one. "Are you sure we can afford it, Father?" she queried.

Dr. Alden nodded convincingly. "For a few weeks, certainly," he returned.

"Then we don't need to worry about afterward," rejoined Madge. "And don't you think, girls, it will be perfectly great, so long as we are going to Madeleine's wedding in New York, for us to spend this holiday at the seashore?"

"Where, Madge?" asked Lillian.

"I'll tell you," answered Mrs. Curtis, "only not to-day. It is a secret. Here is our pineapple lemonade. Let's hope for the happiest of holidays for the little captain and her crew aboard the good ship 'Merry Maid'."

CHAPTER III

TAŇIA, A PRINCESS

"MADGE, do you think there is any chance that Tom won't meet us?" inquired Eleanor Butler nervously. "I do wish we could have come on to New York with Lillian, Phil, and Miss Jenny Ann instead of making that visit to Baltimore. It seems so funny that they have been in New York two whole days before us. I suppose they have see Madeleine's presents, and our bridesmaids' dresses—and everything!"

Eleanor sighed as she leaned back luxuriously in the chair of the Pullman coach, gazing down the aisle at her fellow passengers.

Madge was occupied in staring very hard at her reflection in the small mirror between her seat and Eleanor's. She had wrinkled her small nose and was surreptitiously applying powder to the tip end of it.

"Of course Tom and the girls will meet us, Eleanor," she replied emphatically. "Tom would expect us to be lost forever if we were to be turned loose in New York by ourselves. Oh, dear me, isn't it too splendid that we are going to be Madeleine's bridesmaids? I wonder if

we shall look very 'country' before so many society people?"

"Of course we shall," returned Eleanor calmly. "You need not look at yourself again in that mirror. You are very well satisfied with yourself, aren't you?" teased Eleanor.

Madge blushed and laughed. "I *do* like our clothes, Nellie," she admitted candidly. "You know perfectly well that we have never had tailored suits before in our lives. You do look too sweet in that pale gray, like a little nun. That pink rose in your hat gives just the touch of color you need. I am sure I don't see why you are so sure we shall seem countrified," ended Madge. She had liked her reflection in the glass. She wore a light-weight blue serge traveling suit without a wrinkle in it, a spotless white linen waist, and her new hat was particularly attractive. Her cheeks were becomingly flushed and her eyes glowed with the excitement of arriving for the first time in New York City.

"We are almost in Jersey City now, aren't we, Madge?" exclaimed Eleanor, making a leap for her bag, which promptly tumbled out of the rack above and fell directly on the head of a young man who was walking down the aisle of the car.

Madge giggled. Eleanor, however, was crimson with mortification. The young man did not

appear to be pleased. The girls had a brief glimpse of him. He had blue eyes and sandy hair and was exceedingly tall. Eleanor's bag had knocked his glasses off and he was obliged to stoop in search of them in the aisle.

"Oh, I am so sorry," apologized Eleanor in her soft, Southern voice, as she picked up the glasses and restored them to their owner. "I am glad they were not broken."

The young man paid not the slightest attention to her apology.

"Hurry, Nellie," advised Madge, "it is nearly time for us to get off the train and your hat is on crooked. Don't be such a timid little goose! You are actually trembling. Of course Tom or some one will meet us, and if they don't I shall not be in the least frightened." Madge announced this grandly. "That whistle means we are entering Jersey City. We will find Tom waiting for us at the gate."

Eleanor obediently followed Madge out of their coach. The little captain seemed older and more self-confident since she had been graduated at Miss Tolliver's, but Nellie hoped devoutly that her cousin would not become imbued with the impression that she was really grown-up. It would spoil their good times.

The two girls had never seen such a headlong rush of people in their lives. They clung

desperately to their bags when a porter attempted to carry them. A man bumped violently against Madge, but he made no effort to apologize as he rushed on through the crowd.

"I never saw so many people in such a hurry in my life," declared Nellie pettishly. "They behave as though they thought New York City were on fire and they were all rushing to put the fire out. I shall be glad when Tom takes charge of us."

Once through the great iron gates the girls looked anxiously about for Tom, but saw no trace of him.

"I suppose Tom must have missed the ferry," declared Madge with pretended cheerfulness. "We shall have to wait here for only about ten minutes until the next ferry boat comes across from New York."

When fifteen minutes had passed and there was still no sign of Tom, Madge began to feel worried.

"Madge, I am sure you have made some kind of mistake," argued Eleanor plaintively. "I know Mrs. Curtis would not fail to have some one here on time to meet us for anything in the world. Perhaps Tom wrote for us to come across the ferry, and that he would meet us on the New York side. Where is his letter?"

"It is in my trunk, Nellie," replied Madge

in a crestfallen manner. She was not nearly so grown-up or so sure of herself as she had been half an hour before. "I know it was silly in me not to have brought Tom's letter with me, but I was so sure that I knew just what it said. Perhaps we had better go on over to New York. Let's hurry. Perhaps that boat is just about to start."

The two young women hurried aboard the boat, which left the dock a moment later, just as a tall, fair-haired young man, accompanied by two girls, hurried upon the scene. The young man was Tom Curtis and the young women were Phyllis Alden and Lillian Seldon.

In the meantime Madge and her cousin had crossed the river and had landed on the New York side. What was the dreadful roar and rumble that met their ears? It sounded like an earthquake, with the noise of frightened people shrieking above it. After a horrified moment it dawned on the two little strangers that this was only the usual roar of New York, which Tom Curtis had so often described to them.

"There isn't any use of our staying here very long, Eleanor," declared Madge, feeling a great wave of loneliness and fear sweep over her. "An accident must have happened to Tom's automobile on his way to the train to meet us. I am afraid we were foolish not to

have stayed at the Jersey City station. I am sure Tom wrote he would meet us there. I have behaved like a perfect goose. It is because I boasted so much about not being frightened and knowing what to do. But I *do* know Mrs. Curtis's address. We can take a cab and drive up there."

Eleanor would fall in with Madge's plans to a certain point; then she would strike. Now she positively refused to get into a cab. Her mother and father and Miss Jenny Ann had warned her never to trust herself in a cab in a strange city. New York was too terrifying! Eleanor would search for Mrs. Curtis's home on foot, in a car, or a bus, but in a cab she would not ride.

Madge was obliged to give in gracefully. A policeman showed the girls to a Twenty-third Street car. He explained that when they came to the Third Avenue L they must get out of the car and take the elevated train uptown, since Madge had explained to him that Mrs. Curtis lived on Seventieth Street between Madison and Fifth Avenues.

There was only one point that the policeman failed to make clear to Eleanor and Madge. He neglected to tell them that elevated trains, as well as other cars, travel both up and down New York City, and the way to discover which way

the "L" train is moving is to consult the signs on the steps that lead up to the elevated road. The policeman supposed that the two young women would make this observation for themselves. Of course, under ordinary circumstances, Madge and Nellie would have been more sensible, but they were frightened and confused at the bare idea of being alone in New York and consequently lost their heads, and they dashed up the Third Avenue elevated steps without looking for signs, settled themselves in the train and were off, as they supposed, for Seventieth Street.

They were too much interested in gazing into upstairs windows, where hundreds of people were at work in tiny, dark rooms, to pay much attention to the first stops at stations that their train made. They knew they were still some distance from Mrs. Curtis's. Madge was completely fascinated at the spectacle of a fat, frowsy woman holding a baby by its skirt on the sill of a six-story tenement house. Just as the car went by the baby made a leap toward the train. Madge smothered her scream as the woman jerked the child out of danger just in time. Then it suddenly occurred to her that this was hardly the kind of neighborhood in which to find Mrs. Curtis's house. The sign at the next stop was a name and not a street number. It

could not be possible that she and Eleanor had made another mistake!

Madge hurried back to the end of the car to find the conductor.

"We wish to get out at the nearest station to Seventieth Street and Lexington Avenue," she declared timidly.

The man paid not the slightest attention to her. Madge repeated her question in a somewhat bolder tone.

"You ain't going to get off near Seventieth Street for some time if you keep a-traveling away from it," retorted the conductor crossly. "You've got on a downtown 'L' 'stead of an up. Better change at the next station. You'll find an uptown train across the street," the man ended more kindly, seeing the look of consternation on Madge's white face.

The girls walked sadly down the elevated steps, dragging their bags, which seemed to grow heavier with every moment. They found themselves in one of the downtown foreign slums of New York City. It was a bright, early summer afternoon. The streets were swarming with grown people and children. Pushcarts lined the sidewalks. On an opposite corner a hand organ played an Italian song. In front of it was a small open space, encircled by a group of idle men and women. Before the or-

gan danced a little figure that Madge and Eleanor stopped to watch. They forgot their own bewilderment in gazing at the strange sight. The dancer was a little girl about twelve years old, as thin as a wraith. Her hair was black and hung in straight, short locks to her shoulders. Her eyes were so big and burned so brightly that it was difficult to notice any other feature of her face. The child looked like a tropical flower. Her face was white, but her cheeks glowed with two scarlet patches. She flung her little arms over her head, pirouetted and stood on her tip toes. She did not seem to see the curious crowd about her, but kept her eyes turned toward the sky. Her dancing was as much a part of nature as the summer sunshine, and Madge and Eleanor were bewitched.

A rough woman came out of a nearby doorway. She stood with her hands on her hips looking in the direction of the music. "Tania!" she called angrily. Elbowing her way through the crowd, she jostled Madge as she passed by her. "Tania!" she cried again. The men and women spectators let the woman make her way through them as though they knew her and were afraid of her heavy fist. Only the child appeared to be unconscious of the woman's approach. Suddenly a big, red arm was thrust out. It caught the little girl by the skirt. With the

other hand she rained down blows on the child's upturned face. One blow followed the other in swift succession. The little dancer made no outcry. She simply put one thin arm over her head for protection.

The music went on gayly. No one of the watching men and women tried to stop the woman's brutality. But Madge was not used to the indifference of the New York crowd. Like a flash of lightning she darted away from Eleanor and rushed over to the woman, who was dragging the child along and cuffing her at each step.

"Stop striking that child!" she ordered sharply. "How can you be so cruel? You are a wicked, heartless woman!"

The woman paid no attention to Madge. She did not seem even to have heard her, but lifted her big, coarse arm for another blow.

Madge's breath came in swift gasps. "Don't strike that child again," she repeated. "I don't know who she is, nor what she has done, but she is too little for you to beat her like that. I won't endure it," the little captain ended in sudden passion.

The woman turned her cruel, bloodshot eyes slowly toward Madge. She was one of the strongest and most brutal characters in the slums of New York, and few dared to oppose

her. She was even a terror to the policemen in the neighborhood.

"Git out!" she said briefly.

Her arm descended. It did not strike the child. Quick as a flash, Madge Morton had flung herself between the woman and the child. For a moment the blow almost stunned the girl. The East Side crowd closed in on the girl and the woman. If there was going to be a fight, the spectators did not intend to miss it. Eleanor was numb with fear and sympathy. She did not know whether to be more frightened for Madge than sorry for the child.

The woman's face was mottled and crimson with anger. Madge's face was very white. She held her head high and looked her enemy full in the face.

"Git out of this and stop your interferin'!" shouted the virago. "This here child belongs to me and I'll do what I like with her. If you are one of them social settlers coming around into poor people's places and meddlin' with their business, you'd better git back where you belong or I'll social-settle you."

At this moment a thin, hot hand caught hold of Madge's and pulled it gently. Madge gazed down into a little face, whose expression she never forgot. It was whiter than it had been before. The scarlet color had gone out of the

cheeks and the big, black eyes burned brighter. But there was not the slightest trace of fear in the look. Instead, the child's lips were curved into an elf-like smile.

"Don't stay here, lady, please," she begged. "The ogress will be horrid to you. She can't hurt me. You see, I am an enchanted Princess."

An instant later the child received a savage blow from the woman's hard hand full in the face without shrinking. It was Madge who winced. Tears rose to her eyes. She put her arms about the child and tried to shelter her.

"Don't be calling me no names, Tania," the woman cried, dragging at the child's thin skirts. "Jest you come along home with me and you'll git what is comin' to you, you good-for-nothin' little imp."

"Is she your mother?" asked Madge doubtfully, gazing at the brutal woman and the strange child.

Tania shook her black head scornfully. "Oh, dear, no," she answered. "It is only that I have to live with her now, while I am under the enchantment. Some day, when the wicked spell is broken, I shall go away, perhaps to a wonderful castle. My name is Titania. I think it means that I am the Queen of the Fairies."

The woman laughed brutishly. "Queen of the gutter, you are, Miss Tania. I'll tan you,"

she jeered, as she dragged the little girl from Madge's arms.

The little captain looked despairingly about her. There, a calm witness of the entire scene, was a big New York policeman. "Officer," commanded Madge indignantly, "make that woman leave that child alone."

The big policeman looked sheepish. "I can't do nothing with Sal," he protested. "If I make her stop beating Tania now, she'll only be meaner to her when she gets her indoors. Best leave 'em alone, I think. I have interfered, but the child says she don't mind. I don't think she does, somehow; she's such a queer young 'un'."

Sal was now engaged in shaking Tania as she pushed her along in front of her. Madge and Eleanor were in despair.

Suddenly a well-dressed young man appeared in the crowd. There was something oddly familiar in his appearance to Eleanor, but she failed to remember where she had seen him before. "Sal!" he called out sharply, "leave Tania alone!"

Instantly the woman obeyed him. She slunk back into her open doorway. The crowd melted as though by magic; they also recognized the young man's authority. A moment later he was gone. Madge, Eleanor, and the strange little girl stood on the street corner almost alone.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNINVITED GUEST

"ARE you good fairies who have strayed away from home?" inquired Tania, calmly gazing first at Madge and then at Eleanor. She was perfectly self-possessed and asked her question as though it were the most natural one in the world.

The two girls stared hard at the child. Was her mind affected, or was she playing a game with them? Tania seemed not in the least disturbed. "Do go away now," she urged. "I am all right, but something may happen to you."

"You odd little thing!" laughed Madge. "We are not fairies. We are girls and we are lost. We are on our way to visit a friend, Mrs. Curtis, who lives on Seventieth Street near Fifth Avenue. She will be dreadfully worried about us if we don't hurry on. But what can we do for you? We can't take you with us, yet you must not go back to that wicked woman."

"Oh, yes, I must," returned Tania cheerfully. "I am not afraid of her. When the time comes I shall go away."

"But who will take care of you, baby?" asked

Eleanor. "Fairies don't live in big cities like New York. They live only in beautiful green woods and fields."

The black head nodded wisely. "Good fairies are everywhere," she declared. "But I can make handfuls of pennies when I like," she continued boastfully. "Let me show you how you must go on your way."

"You can't possibly know, little girl," replied Madge gently. "It is so far from here."

However, it was Tania who finally saw the two lost houseboat girls on board the elevated train that would take them to within a few blocks of their destination. Tania explained that she knew almost all of New York, and particularly she liked to wander up and down Fifth Avenue to gaze at the beautiful palaces. She was not young, she was really dreadfully old—almost thirteen!

The last look Madge and Eleanor had of Tania the child had apparently forgotten all about them. She was gazing up in the air, above all the traffic and roar of New York, with a happy smile on her elfish face.

"My dear children, I wouldn't have had it happen for worlds!" was Mrs. Curtis's first

greeting as she came out from behind the rose-colored curtains of her drawing room. "Tom has been telephoning me frantically for the past hour. How did he and the girls miss you? You poor dears, you must be nearly tired to death after your unpleasant experience."

While Mrs. Curtis was talking she was leading her visitors up a beautiful carved oak staircase to the floor above. Her house was so handsomely furnished that Madge and Eleanor were startled at its luxurious appointments.

Mrs. Curtis brought her guests into a large sleeping room which opened into another bedroom which was for the use of Phil and Lillian.

Madeleine was to be married the next afternoon at four o'clock. The girls had not brought their bridesmaids' dresses along with them, as Mrs. Curtis had asked to be allowed to present them with their gowns.

It was all that Madge could do not to beg Mrs. Curtis to show them their frocks. She hoped that their hostess would offer to do so, but during the rest of the day their time was occupied in seeing Madeleine, her hundreds of beautiful wedding gifts, meeting Judge Hilliard all over again, and being introduced to Mrs. Curtis's other guests. The four girls went to bed at midnight, thinking of their bridesmaids' gowns,

but without having had the chance even to inquire about them.

Mrs. Curtis belonged to the old and infinitely more aristocratic portion of New York society. She did not belong to the new smart set, which numbers nearer four thousand, and does so much to make society ridiculous. Madeleine had asked that she might be married very quietly. She had never become used to the gay world of fashion after her strange and unhappy youth. It made the girls and their teacher smile to see what Mrs. Curtis considered a quiet wedding.

Miss Jenny Ann and her four charges had their coffee and rolls in Madge's room the next morning at about nine o'clock. Madge peeped out of the doorway, there were so many odd noises in the hall. The upstairs hall was a mass of beautiful evergreens. Men were hanging garlands of smilax on the balusters. The house was heavy with the scent of American Beauty roses. But there was no sign of Mrs. Curtis or of Madeleine or Tom, and still no mention of the bridesmaids' costumes for the girls.

Lillian Seldon was looking extremely forlorn. "Suppose Mrs. Curtis has forgotten our frocks!" she suggested tragically, as Madge came back with her report of the house's decorations. "She has had such an awful lot to at-

tend to that she may not have remembered that she offered to give us our frocks. Won't it be dreadful if Madeleine has to be married without our being bridesmaids after all?"

"O Lillian! what a dreadful idea!" exclaimed Eleanor.

Even Phyllis looked sober and Miss Jenny Ann looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"O, you geese! cheer up!" laughed Madge. "I know Mrs. Curtis would not disappoint us for worlds. Why, she has all our measures. She couldn't forget. Oh, dear, does my breakfast gown look all right? There is some one knocking at our door. It may be that Mrs. Curtis has sent up our frocks."

"Then open the door, for goodness' sake," begged Eleanor. "Your breakfast gown is lovely; only at home we called it a wrapper, but then you were not visiting on Fifth Avenue."

Madge made a saucy little face at Eleanor. Then she saw a group of persons standing just outside their bedroom door. A man-servant held four enormous white boxes in his arms; a maid was almost obscured by four other boxes equally large. Behind her servants stood Mrs. Curtis, smiling radiantly, while Tom was peeping over his mother's shoulder.

Madge clasped her hands fervently, breath-

ing a quick sigh of relief. "Our bridesmaids' dresses! I'm too delighted for words."

"Were you thinking about them, dear?" apologized Mrs. Curtis. "I ought to have sent the frocks to you sooner, but I wanted to bring them myself, and this is the first moment I have had. You'll let Tom come in to see them, too, won't you?"

The man-servant departed, but Mrs. Curtis kept the maid to help her lift out the gowns from the billows of white tissue paper that enfolded them. She lifted out one dress, Miss Jenny Ann another, and the maid the other two.

The girls were speechless with pleasure.

Mrs. Curtis, however, was disappointed. Perhaps the girls did not like the costumes. She had used her own taste without consulting them. Then she glanced at the little group and was reassured by their radiant faces.

"O you wonderful fairy godmother!" exclaimed Madge. "Cinderella's dress at the ball couldn't have been half so lovely!"

Madeleine's wedding was to be in white and green. The bridesmaids' frocks were of the palest green silk, covered with clouds of white chiffon. About the bottom of the skirts were bands of pale green satin and the chiffon was caught here and there with embroidered wreaths of lilies of the valley. The hats were of

white chip, ornamented with white and pale green plumes.

It was small wonder that four young girls, three of them poor, should have been awe-struck at the thought of appearing in such gowns.

"I shall save mine for my own wedding dress!" exclaimed Eleanor.

"I shall make my début in mine," insisted Lillian.

"We can't thank you enough," declared Phyllis, a little overcome by so much grandeur.

Tom was standing in a far corner of the room.

"I would like to suggest that I be allowed to come into this," he demanded firmly.

"You, Tom?" teased Madge. "You're merely the audience."

Tom took four small square boxes out of his pocket. "Don't you be too sure, Miss Madge Morton. My future brother-in-law, Judge Robert Hilliard, has commissioned me to present his gifts to his bridesmaids. Madge shall be the last person to see in these boxes, just for her unkind treatment of me."

"All right, Tom," agreed Madge; "I don't think I could stand anything more just at this instant."

Nevertheless Madge peeped over Phil's

shoulder. Judge Hilliard had presented each one of the houseboat girls with an exquisite little pin, an enameled model of their houseboat, done in white and blue, the colors of the "Merry Maid."

The wedding was over. There were still a few guests in the dining room saying good-bye to Mrs. Curtis and Tom; but Madeleine and Judge Hilliard had gone. The four girls and Miss Jenny Ann found a resting place in the beautiful French music room.

Madeleine's wedding presents were in the library, just behind the music room.

"It was simply perfect, wasn't it, Miss Jenny Ann?" breathed Lillian, as they drew their chairs together for a talk.

"Madeleine must be perfectly happy," sighed Eleanor sentimentally. "Judge Hilliard is so good-looking."

"Oh, dear me!" broke in Madge, coming out of a brown study. She was sitting in a big carved French chair. "I don't see how Madeleine Curtis could have left her mother and this beautiful home for any man in the world. I am sure if I had such an own mother I should never leave her," finished the little captain.

"Until some one came along whom you loved better," interposed Miss Jenny Ann.

"That could never be, Miss Jenny Ann," declared Madge stoutly, her blue eyes wistful. "Why, if my father is alive and I find him, I shall never leave him for anybody else."

"What's that noise?" demanded Phyllis sharply.

It was after six o'clock and the Curtis home was brilliantly lighted. The window blinds were all closed. But there was a curious rapping and scratching at one of the windows that opened into a small side yard.

"It may be one of the servants," suggested Miss Jenny Ann, listening intently.

"It can't be," rejoined Madge. "No one of them would make such a strange noise."

"I think I had better call Tom," breathed Eleanor faintly. "It must be a burglar trying to steal Madeleine's wedding gifts."

Madge shook her head. "Wait, please," she whispered. She ran to the window. There was the faint scratching noise again! Madge lifted the shade quickly. Perched on the window sill was the oddest figure that ever stepped out of the pages of a fairy book. It was impossible to see just what it was, yet it looked like a little girl. One hand clung to the window facing, a small nose pressed against the pane.

"Why, it's a child!" exclaimed Miss Jenny Ann in tones of relief. "Open the window and let her come in."

Madge flung open the window. Light as a thistledown, the unexpected little visitor landed in the center of the room.

Madge and Eleanor had completely forgotten the elfin child they had met in the slums of New York City; but now she appeared among them just as mysteriously as though she were the fairy she pretended to be.

She wore a small red coat that was half a dozen sizes too tiny for her. Her skirt was patched with odds and ends of bright flowered materials. On her head perched a cap, a scarlet flower, cut from an odd scrap of old wall paper. In her hands Tania clasped a ridiculous bundle, done up in a dirty handkerchief.

"You strange little witch!" exclaimed Madge. "However did you find your way here? Be very still and good until the lovely lady who owns this house sees you, then I wouldn't be at all surprised if she gave you some cake and ice cream before she sends you away."

Tania sat down in the corner still as a mouse. Her thin knees were hunched close together. She held her poor bundle tightly. Her big black eyes grew larger and darker with wonder as she had her first glimpse of a fairyland, outside her

own imagination, in the beautiful room and the group of lovely girls who occupied it.

Mrs. Curtis came in a minute later, followed by a man who had been one of the guests at the wedding. Madge, Eleanor, and Tania recognized him instantly. He was the young man who had protected Tania from the blows of the brutal woman the afternoon before, but Tania did not seem pleased to see him. Her face flushed hotly, her lips quivered, though she made no sound.

Mrs. Curtis smiled quizzically. Madge could see that there were tears behind her smiles. "Who is our latest guest, Madge?" she asked, gazing kindly at the odd little person.

Tania rose gravely from her place on the floor. "I am a fairy who has been under the spell of a wicked witch," she asserted with solemnity, "but now the spell is broken and I've run away from her. I shan't go back ever any more."

Mrs. Curtis's young man guest took the child firmly by the shoulders.

"What do you mean by coming here to trouble these young ladies?" he demanded sternly. "I thought I recognized your friends, Mrs. Curtis. They saved this child yesterday from a punishment she probably well deserved. She is one of the children in our slum neighborhood that we

have not been able to reach. I will take her back to her home with me at once."

The child's head was high in the air. She caught her breath. Her eyes had a queer, eerie look in them. "You can't take me back now," she insisted. "The spell is broken. I shall never see old Sal again."

Madge put her arm about the small witch girl. "Let her stay here just to-night, Mrs. Curtis, please," begged Madge earnestly. "I wish to find out something about her. I will look after her and see that she does not do any harm."

Quite seriously and gently Tania knelt on one knee and kissed Mrs. Curtis's hand. "Let me stay. I shall be on my way again in the morning," she pleaded, "but I am a little afraid of the night."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Curtis, gently drawing the waif to her side, "you are far too little to be running away from home. You may stay here to-night, then to-morrow we will see what we can do for you. I won't trouble you with her to-night, Philip," she added, turning to her guest.

"It will be no trouble," returned Philip Holt blandly. "She lives less than an hour's ride from here. Her foster mother will be greatly worried at her absence."

Mrs. Curtis looked hesitatingly at Tania, who

had been listening with alert ears. The child's black eyes took on a look of lively terror. "Please, please let me stay," she begged, clasping her thin little hands in anxious appeal.

"Won't you let Tania stay here to-night, Mrs. Curtis?" asked Madge for the second time. "I am sorry to disagree with Mr. Holt, but I do not believe that poor little Tania is either lawless or incorrigible. The woman who claims her is the most cruel, brutal-looking person I ever saw. I am sure she is not Tania's mother. Let me keep her here to-night, and to-morrow I will inquire into her case."

"Very well, Madge," said Mrs. Curtis reluctantly. She glanced toward Philip Holt. His eyes, however, were fixed upon Madge with an expression of disapproval and dislike. For the first time it occurred to Mrs. Curtis that Philip Holt might be very disagreeable if thwarted. She immediately dismissed the thought as unworthy when the young man said smoothly: "I shall be only too glad to have Miss Morton investigate the child's record. I am sorry that my word has not been sufficient to convince her."

Madge made no reply to this thrust. Then an awkward silence ensued. Mrs. Curtis looked annoyed, Tania triumphant, Madge belligerent, and the other girls sympathetic. Making a

strong effort, Philip Holt controlled his anger and, extending his hand to Mrs. Curtis, said: "Pray, pardon my interference. I was prompted to speak merely in your interest. I trust I shall see you again in the near future. Good night." He bowed coldly to the young women and took his departure.

"What a disagreeable——" Madge stopped abruptly. Her face flushed. "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Curtis," she said contritely. "I shouldn't have spoken my mind aloud."

"I forgive you, my dear," there was a slight tone of constraint in Mrs. Curtis's voice, "but I am sure if you knew Mr. Holt as I do you would have an entirely different opinion of him."

"Perhaps I should," returned Madge politely, but in her heart she knew that she and Philip Holt were destined not to be friends, but bitter enemies.

CHAPTER V

TANIA, A PROBLEM

"DON'T you think it would be a splendid plan for Tania?" asked Madge eagerly. "Miss Jenny Ann and the girls are willing she should come to us. Tania is such a fascinating little person, with her dreams and her pretences, that she is the best kind of company. Besides, I am awfully sorry for her."

Mrs. Curtis and Madge were seated in the latter's bedroom indulging in one of their old-time confidential talks.

"Tania would be a great deal of care for you, Madge," argued Mrs. Curtis. "She is worrying my maids almost distracted with her foolishness. Last night she wrapped herself in a sheet and frightened poor Norah almost to death by dancing in the moonlight. She explained to Norah that she was pretending that she was a moonflower swaying in the wind. I wonder where the child got such odd fancies and bits of information? She has never seen a moonflower in her life." Mrs. Curtis laughed and frowned at the same time. "Poor little daughter of the tenements! She is indeed a problem."

"Shall I tell you all I have been able to find out about Tania?" asked Madge. "Her history is quite like a story-book tale. I think her father and mother were actors, but the father died when Tania was only a little baby. That is why, I suppose, they called the child by such an absurd name as 'Titania.' I looked it up and it comes from Shakespeare's play of 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' I think perhaps her mother was just a dancer, or had only a small part in the plays in which she appeared, for they never had any money. Tania has lived in a tenement always. The mother used to take care of her baby when she could, and then leave her to the neighbors. But the mother must have been unusual, too, for she taught Tania all sorts of poetry and music when Tania was only a tiny child. Indeed, Tania knows a great deal more about literature than I do now," confessed Madge honestly. "It isn't so strange, after all, that Tania pretends. Why, she and her mother used to play at pretending together. When they sat down to their dinner they used to rub their old lamp and play that it was Aladdin's wonderful lamp, and that their poor table was spread with a wonderful feast, instead of just bread and cheese. They tried to make light of their poverty."

Mrs. Curtis's eyes were full of tears. She

could understand better than Madge the scene the young girl pictured.

"Tania was eight years old when her mother died," finished Madge pensively. "Since then poor Tania has had such a dreadful time, living with that wretched old Sal, who has made a regular slavey of her, and she just had to go on with her pretending in order to be able to bear her life at all."

Madge and Mrs. Curtis were both silent for a moment. The bright June sunshine flooded the room, offering a sharp contrast to Tania's sad little story.

"You see why I wish to take her on the houseboat," pleaded Madge. "It seems so wonderful that we are going to Cape May and will be on the really seashore, near you and Tom, that each one of us feels the desire to do something for somebody just to show how happy we are. Miss Jenny Ann says we may take Tania, if you think it wouldn't be unwise."

"She ought to go to school, Madge," argued Mrs. Curtis half-heartedly. "Tania does not know any of the things she should. Philip Holt, who does so much good work among the poor in Tania's tenement district, says that the child is most unreliable and does not tell the truth."

Madge wrinkled her nose with the familiar expression she wore when annoyed. Her investi-

gations had proved Philip Holt a liar, but she refrained from saying so.

"You don't like Philip, do you?" continued Mrs. Curtis. "It isn't fair to have prejudices without reason. Mr. Holt is a fine young man and does splendid work among the poor. Madeleine and I have entrusted him with the most of the money we have given to charity. I am sorry that you girls don't like him, because he is coming to visit me at Cape May this summer."

Madge dutifully stifled her vague feeling of regret. "Of course, we will try to like him, if he is your friend," she replied loyally. "It was only that we thought Mr. Holt had a terribly superior manner for such a young man, and looked too 'goody-goody'! But you have not answered me yet about Tania. Do let us have Tania. I'll teach her lots of things this summer, and it won't be so hard for her when she goes to school in the fall. She is pretty good with me."

"Very well," consented Mrs. Curtis reluctantly, "for this summer only. The child will get you into difficulties, but I suppose they won't be serious. What is Madge Morton going to do next fall? Is she going to college with Phil, or is she coming to be my daughter?"

Madge lowered her red-brown head. "I don't know, dear," she faltered. "You know I have

said all along to Uncle and Aunt that, just as soon as I was grown up, I was going to start out to find my father. I shall be nineteen next winter. It surely is time for me to begin."

"But, Madge, dear, you can't find your father unless you know where to look for him. The world is a very large place! I am sorry"—Mrs. Curtis smoothed Madge's soft hair tenderly—"but I agree with your uncle and aunt; your father must be dead. Were he alive he would surely have tried to find his little daughter long before this. Your uncle and aunt have never heard from or of him during all these years."

"I don't feel sure that he is dead," returned Madge thoughtfully. "You see, my father disappeared after his court-martial in the Navy. He never dreamed that some day his superior officer would confess his own guilt and declare Father innocent. I can't, I won't, believe he is dead. Somewhere in this world he lives and some day I shall find him, I am sure of it. Phil, Lillian and Eleanor have all pledged themselves to my cause, too," she added, smiling faintly.

"I'll do all that I can to help you, Madge. Just have a good time this summer, and in the autumn, perhaps, there may be some information for you to work on. What is that dreadful noise? I never heard anything like it in my house before!" exclaimed Mrs. Curtis.

Madge sprang to her feet. There was the sound of a heavy fall in the next room, a scream, then a discreet knock on Madge's door.

"Come!" commanded Mrs. Curtis.

The door opened and the butler appeared in the doorway, his solemn, red face redder and more solemn than usual.

"Please, it's that child again," he said. "While the young ladies was out in the automobile with Mr. Tom, she went in their room, emptied out one of their trunks and shut herself inside. She said she was 'Hope' and the trunk was 'Pandory's Box,' or some such crazy foolishness. She meant to jump out when the young ladies came back, but Norah went into the room with some clean towels, and when the little one bobs her head out of that box, just like a black witch, poor Norah is scared out of her wits and drops on the floor all of a heap. If that child doesn't go away from here soon, Ma'am, I don't know how we can ever bear it."

"That will do, Richards," answered Mrs. Curtis coldly. But Madge could see that she was dreadfully vexed at Tania's latest naughtiness.

The little captain gave Mrs. Curtis a penitent hug. "It is all my fault, dear. I should never have brought the little witch here," she murmured. "I'll go and make it all right with No-

rah and see that Tania does no more mischief—for a while, at least."

Mrs. Curtis looked somewhat mollified, nevertheless, she was far from pleased, and Madge's championship of little Tania was to cause the little captain more than one unhappy hour.

CHAPTER VI

A MISCHIEVOUS MERMAID

THERE was a splash over the side of a boat, then another, one more, and a fourth. The water rippled and broke away into smooth curves. Down a long streak of moonlight four dark objects floated above the surface of the waves. For a few seconds there was not a sound, not even a shout, to show that the mermaids were at play.

Two dark heads kept in advance of the others.

"Madge," warned a voice, "we must not go too far out. Remember, we promised Jenny Ann. My, but isn't this water glorious! I feel as though I could swim on forever."

A graceful figure turned over and the moonlight shone full on a happy face. The two swimmers moved along more slowly.

"Nellie, Lillian!" Madge called back, "are you all right? Do you wish to go on farther?"

Phil and Madge floated quietly until their two friends caught up with them.

"I feel as though I could go on all night at this rate," declared Lillian Seldon. Eleanor put her hand out. "May I float along with you a little, Madge?" she asked. "I am tired. How

wide and empty the ocean looks to-night! We must not get out of sight of the lights of the 'Merry Maid'."

"There is no danger!" scoffed Madge.

"Look out!" cried Phil Alden sharply. She was swimming ahead. She saw first the sails of a small yacht making across the bay with all speed to the line of the shore that the girls had just quitted.

"Let's follow the boat back home," suggested Madge. "We can keep far enough away for them not to see us. It will be rather good fun if they take us for porpoises or mermaids, or any other queer sea creature."

"Don't run into that Noah's ark that we saw anchored in the creek this morning, Roy," came a shrill voice from the deck of the yacht. "I saw half a dozen women going aboard her this afternoon laden with boxes and trunks—everything but the parrot and the monkey. It looked as though they meant to spend the summer aboard her."

"Perhaps they do, Mabel," a man's voice answered. "The 'Noah's Ark' is a houseboat. It looked very tiny for so many people, but I thought it was rather pretty."

"Well, we have girls enough at Cape May this summer—about six to every man," argued Mabel crossly. "I vote that we give these new

persons the cold shoulder. Nobody knows who they are, nor where they come from. It is bad enough to have to associate with tiresome hotel visitors, but I shall draw the line at these water-rats, and I hope you will do the same."

"She means us," gasped Eleanor. "What a perfectly horrid girl!"

The high, sharp voice on the yacht was distinctly audible over the water. The boat had slowed down as it drew nearer to the shore.

"Swim along with Phil, Nellie," proposed Madge. "I am going to have some fun with those young persons. I don't care if I *am* nearly grown-up; I am not going to miss a lark when there's a chance. I have that rubber ball that Phil and I brought out to play with in the water. Watch me throw it on their yacht. They'll think it's a bomb, or a meteor, if I can throw straight enough. I am going to settle with them this very minute for the disagreeable things they just said about us and our pretty 'Merry Maid.'"

"Don't do it, Madge!" expostulated Phil; but she was too late; Madge had dived and was swimming along almost completely under the water. She swam in the darkness cast by the shadow of the boat as it passed within a few yards of them.

Like a flash she lifted her great rubber ball.

She had better luck than she deserved. The ball came out of nowhere and landed in the center of the group of three young people on the yacht. It fell first on the deck, and then bounced into the lap of the offending Mabel.

It was hard work for the waiting girls not to laugh aloud as naughty Madge came slowly back to them.

A wild shriek went up from on board the yacht. "Oh, dear, what was that?" one girl asked faintly, when the first cries of alarm had died away.

"Where is it? What was it?" growled a masculine voice. "Are you really hurt, Mabel? You are making so much fuss that I can't tell."

Mabel had dropped back in a chair. She was white with fear and trembling violently.

"It is in my lap," she moaned. "It may explode any moment—do take it away!"

The owner of the yacht, Roy Dennis, turned a small electric flashlight full on his two girl guests. There, in Mabel's lap, was surely a round, globular-shaped object that had either dropped from the sky or had been thrown at them by an unknown hand. Roy had really no desire to pick it up without seeing it more clearly.

The other girl was less timid. She reached over and took hold of Madge's ball. Then she

laughed aloud. Oddly enough, her laugh was repeated out on the water.

"Why, it's only a rubber ball!" she asserted. Ethel Swann, who was one of the old-time cottagers at Cape May, ran to the side of the boat. "See!" she exclaimed, "over there are some boys swimming. I suppose they threw the ball on board just to frighten us. They certainly were successful." She hurled Madge's ball back over the water, but Roy Dennis's small yacht had gone some distance from the group of mischievous mermaids and he did not turn back. "If I find out who did that trick, I surely will get even with them," muttered Roy. "I don't like to be made a fool of."

"Don't tell Jenny Ann, please, girls," begged Madge, as the four girls clambered aboard the "Merry Maid." "It was a very silly trick that I played. I should hate to have the cottagers at the Cape hear of it. I don't suppose I shall ever grow up."

"Girls, whatever made you stay in the water so long?" demanded Miss Jenny Ann, coming into the girls' stateroom with a big pitcher of hot chocolate and a plate of cakes. "I have been uneasy about you. You have been in the water for half an hour. That's too long for a first swim. Poor Tania is fast asleep. The child is utterly worn out with so much excitement. Think

of never having been out of a crowded city in her life, and then seeing this wonderful Cape May! Tania wanted to stay up to wish you good night. I left her staring out of the cabin window at the stars when I went into our kitchen to make the chocolate. When I came back she was asleep."

"Dear Jenny Ann," said Madge penitently, pulling their chaperon down on the berth beside her, while Lillian poured the chocolate, "it was my fault we were late. The bad things are always my fault. But we are going to have a perfectly glorious time this summer, aren't we? Just think, next year Phil and I shall be nineteen and nearly old ladies."

"I wonder if anything special is going to happen to us this holiday?" pondered Phil, crunching away on her third cake.

"Something special always does happen to us," declared Lillian. "Let's go to bed now, because, if we are going to row up the bay in the morning to explore the shore, we shall have to get up early to put the 'Merry Maid' in order. We must be regular old Cape May inhabitants by the time that Mrs. Curtis and Tom arrive."

Next morning bad news came to the crew of the little houseboat. Mrs. Curtis had been called to Chicago by the illness of her brother, and Tom had gone with her. They did not know how soon they would be able to come on to

Cape May; but within a very few days Philip Holt, the goody-goody young man who was one of Mrs. Curtis's special favorites, would come on to Cape May, and Mrs. Curtis hoped that the girls would see that he had a good time.

Neither Madge, Phil, Lillian nor Eleanor felt particularly pleased at this information. But Tania, who was the only one of the party that knew the young man well, burst unexpectedly into a flood of tears, the cause of which she obstinately refused to explain.

CHAPTER VII

CAPTAIN JULES, DEEP SEA DIVER

THE "Water Witch" rocked lazily on the breast of the waves, awaiting the coming of the four girls, who had planned to row up the bay on a voyage of discovery. They were not much interested in staying about among the Cape May cottagers, after the conversation which they had innocently overheard from the deck of the launch the night before. Of course, if Mrs. Curtis and Tom had come on to Cape May at once to occupy their cottage, as they had expected to do, all would have been well. The four young women and their chaperon would have been immediately introduced to the society of the Cape. However, the girls were not repining at their lack of society. They had each other; there was the old town of Cape May to be explored with the great ocean on one side and Delaware Bay on the other.

"Do be careful, children," called Miss Jenny Ann warningly as the girls arranged themselves for a row in their skiff. "In all our experience on the water I never saw so many yachts and pleasure boats as there are on these waters. If you don't keep a sharp look-out one of the larger

boats may run into you. Don't get into trouble."

"We are going away from trouble, Miss Jenny Ann," protested Phil. "There is a yacht club on the sound, but we are going to row up the bay past the shoals and get as far from civilization as possible."

Madge stood up in the skiff and waved her hand to their chaperon. The girls looked like a small detachment of feminine naval cadets in their nautical uniforms. Each one of them wore a dark blue serge skirt of ankle length and a middy blouse with a blue sailor collar. They were without hats, as they hoped to get a coating of seashore tan without wasting any time.

"I shall expect you home by noon," were Miss Jenny Ann's final words as the "Water Witch" danced away from the houseboat.

"Aye, aye, Skipper!" the girls called back in chorus. "Shall we bring back lobsters or clams for luncheon, if we can find them?"

"*Clams!*" hallooed Miss Jenny Ann through her hands. "I am dreadfully afraid of live lobsters." Then the houseboat chaperon retired to write a letter to an artist, a Mr. Theodore Brown, whose acquaintance she had made during the first of the houseboat holidays. He had suggested that he would like to come to Cape May some time later in the summer if any of his houseboat friends would be pleased to see him,

and she was writing to tell him just how greatly pleased they would be.

The "Merry Maid" had found a quiet anchorage in one of the smaller inlets of the Delaware Bay, not far from the town of Cape May. The larger number of the summer cottages were farther away on the tiny islands near the sound and along the ocean front.

The "Water Witch" sped gayly over the blue waters of the bay in the brilliant late June sunshine. Madge and Phil, as usual, were at the oars. Tania crouched quietly at Lillian's feet in the stern of the skiff. Eleanor sat in the prow.

"What do you think of it all, Tania?" Madge asked the little adopted houseboat daughter. Tania had been very silent since their arrival at the seashore. If she were impressed at the wonderful and beautiful things she had seen since she left New York City, she had, so far, said nothing.

Her large black eyes blinked in the dazzling light. She was looking straight up toward the sky in a curious, absorbed fashion. "I was trying to make up my mind, Madge, if this place was as beautiful as my kingdom in Fairyland," answered Tania seriously, "and I believe it is."

"Have you a kingdom in Fairyland, little Tania?" inquired Phil gently. She did not un-

derstand the child's odd fancies, as Madge did.

Tania nodded her head quietly. "Of course I have," she returned simply. "Hasn't every one a Fairyland, where things are just as they should be, beautiful and good and kind? I am the queen of my kingdom."

Phil looked puzzled, but Madge only laughed. "Don't mind Tania, Phil. She is going to be a very sensible little houseboat girl before our holiday is over. Besides, I understand her. She only says some of the things I used to think when I was a tiny child. But I do wish the people on the boats would not stare at us so; there is nothing very wonderful in our appearance."

The girls were trying to guide their rowboat among the other larger craft that were afloat on the bay. They wished to get into the more remote waters. In the meantime it was embarrassing to have smartly dressed women and girls put up their lorgnettes and opera glasses to gaze at the girls as the latter rowed by.

"Can there be anything the matter with us?" asked Phil solicitously. "I never saw anything like this fire of inquisitive stares."

"Of course not, Phil," answered Lillian sensibly. "It is only because we are strangers at Cape May, and most of the people whom we see about come here each year. Then we are the only persons who live in a Noah's ark, as those

pleasant people on the yacht called our pretty 'Merry Maid' last night. Don't worry. Have you thought how odd it is that we won't even know them if we should be introduced to them later? We did not see either them or their boat very plainly last night; we only overheard them talking."

"But I'll know the voice of that woman who screamed," replied Madge rather grimly. "I just dare her to shriek again without my recognizing her dulcet tones."

The girls were now drawing away from the crowded end of the bay. They kept along fairly close to the shore. There was an occasional house near the water, but these dwellings were farther and farther apart. Finally the girls rowed for half a mile without seeing any residence save an occasional fisherman's hut. They hoped to reach some place where they could catch at least a glimpse of the wonderful cedar woods that flourish farther up the coast of the bay.

Suddenly Lillian sang out: "Look, girls, there is the dearest little house! It is almost in the water. It rivals our houseboat, it is so like a ship. Isn't it too cunning for anything!"

Madge and Phyllis rested on their oars. The girls stared curiously.

They saw a house built of shingles that had

turned a soft gray which exactly resembled an old three-masted schooner. It had a tiny porch in front, but the first roof ended in a point, the second rose higher, like a larger sail, and the third, which must have covered the kitchen, was about the height of the first.

"See, Tania, I can make the funny house by putting my fingers together," laughed Lillian. "My thumbs are the first roof, my three fingers the second, and my little fingers the last."

The girls rowed nearer the odd cottage. The place was deserted; at least they saw no one about. Over the front door of the house hung a trim little sign inscribed, "The Anchorage."

"Dear me, here is a boathouse, and we've a houseboat!" exclaimed Eleanor. "I wish we dared go ashore and knock at the door, to ask some one to show us over it."

"I don't think we had better try it, Eleanor," remonstrated Phil. "The house probably belongs to some grouchy old sea captain who has built it to get away from people."

At this moment a man at least six feet tall, wearing old yellow tarpaulins, came around the side of the house of the three sails with a large basket on each arm. He sat down on a rock in front of the house and began lifting mussel and oyster shells out of one of his baskets. He would peer at them earnestly before throwing

"Good Morning!" Shouted Madge.

them over to one side. He was a giant of a man, past middle age. His face was so weather-beaten that his skin was like leather. His eyes were blue as only a sailor's eyes can be. On one of the man's shoulders perched a wizened little monkey that every now and then tugged at its master's grizzled hair or chattered in his ear.

The man did not observe the girls in the rowboat, although they were only a few yards away.

"Good morning," sang out Madge cheerfully, forgetting the vow of silence which the girls had made that morning against the Cape Mayites. But then, the girls had never dreamed of seeing such a fascinating seafaring old mariner. Their vow had been taken against the society people.

The sailor, however, did not return Madge's friendly salutation; he went on examining his oyster and mussel shells.

Madge looked crestfallen. The old sailor had such a splendid, strong face. He did not seem to be the kind of man who would fail to return a friendly good morning greeting.

"I don't think he heard you, Madge. Let's all halloo together," proposed Lillian.

"Good morning!" shouted five young voices in a mischievous chorus.

The seaman lifted his big head. His smile came slowly, wrinkling his face into heavy

creases. "Good morning, mates," he called heartily. "Coming ashore?"

"Oh, may we?" cried Madge in return. "We should *dearly* love to!"

The five girls needed no further invitation. They piled out of the "Water Witch" before their host could come near enough to assist them.

The seaman did not invite them into the house. The girls took their seats on the big rock near the water. Madge was farthest away, but promptly the monkey leaped from its master's shoulder and planted itself in Madge's hair, pulling the strands violently while he chattered angrily.

"You horrid little thing!" she cried; "you hurt. I wonder if you hate red hair. Is that the reason you are trying to pull mine out? Please, somebody, take this playful beast away."

The old sea captain, as the girls guessed him to be, promptly came to Madge's rescue and removed the angry monkey.

"You must forgive my pet," he remarked kindly. "My little Madge is jealous. She doesn't like strangers and we don't often have young lady visitors."

"Madge!" exclaimed the little captain, smiling as she tried to re-arrange her hair. "What

a funny name for a monkey. Why, that is my name!"

After a few advances the monkey became very friendly with the other girls, but she would have nothing to do with Madge. She would fly into a perfect tempest of rage whenever Madge approached her or tried to talk to her. The monkey even deserted her master to perch in Tania's arms. The animal put its little, scrawny arms about the queer child's neck, and there was almost the same elfish, wistful look in both pairs of dark eyes.

"Do you catch many fish in these waters?" inquired Eleanor, whose housewifely soul was interested in the big basket of lobsters that she saw crawling about, writhing and twisting as though they were in agony.

"Almost every kind that lives in temperate waters," answered the sailor, "but there is nothing like the variety one finds in the tropics."

"Were you once a sea captain?" asked Lillian curiously.

The man shook his head. "I'm not a captain in the United States service," he returned. "I am called captain in these parts, 'Captain Jules,' but I have only commanded a freight schooner."

"I know I have no right to be so curious," in-

terposed Madge, "but I dearly love everything about the sea. Were you ever a deep sea diver? Somehow you look like one."

"I was a pearl-fisher for many years," the seaman answered as calmly as though diving for pearls was one of the most ordinary trades in the world. But his eyes twinkled as he heard Madge's gasp of admiration and caught the expression on the faces of the other girls.

"You were looking for pearls in those oysters and mussel shells when our boat came along, weren't you?" divined Madge, regarding him with large eyes.

The man nodded a smiling answer.

"Yes, but I didn't expect to find any pearls," he answered. "It is strange how a man's old occupation will cling to him, even after he has long ago given it up. There are very few pearls to be found now in the Delaware Bay or the waters around here."

Captain Jules was gravely removing lobsters from his basket for Tania's entertainment while he talked to Madge. Tania was watching him, breathless with admiration and terror. The captain would take hold of one of the great, crawling things, rub it softly on its horned head as one would rub a tabby cat to make it purr. He would then set the lobster up on its hind claws and the funny crustacean would fall

quietly asleep, as though it were nodding in a chair.

"I never saw anything so queer in my life," chuckled Phil. "You hypnotize the lobsters, don't you?"

Captain Jules shook his shaggy head. He was proud of the appreciation his accomplishment had excited. "No; I don't hypnotize them," he explained. "Anybody can make old Father Lobster fall asleep if he only rubs him in the right place. You are not going, are you?" for the girls had risen to depart.

"I am afraid we must," said Madge; "we promised to get back to our houseboat by noon. If you come down to Cape May, won't you please come to see us? Our houseboat is a rival to your boathouse."

"You are very kind," answered the old captain, shaking his head, "but I don't do much visiting. I thank you just the same. Let me fix you up a basket of fish. Afraid of the lobsters, aren't you, little girl?" he said, smiling at Tania.

The old sailor followed his visitors to help them aboard their rowboat. He walked beside Madge, keeping a careful watch on his monkey, which still chattered and gesticulated, showing her hatred of the little captain.

The girls realized that this man had the man-

ners of a gentleman, although he looked as rough and uncouth as a common sailor. There was a kind of nobility about him, as of a man who has lived and fought with the big things of the earth.

Madge looked at him beseechingly just before they arrived at their skiff. Now, when Madge desired anything very greatly she was hard to resist. Her blue eyes wore their most bewitching expression. "Please," she faltered, "I want you to do me a favor. I know I have no right to ask it, but, but——"

"What is it?" inquired Captain Jules, smiling.

"Have you your diving suit?" asked Madge. "If you have, and you would show it to me some day, I would be too happy for words." Madge blushed at her own temerity.

The captain shook his head. There was little encouragement in his expression. "Maybe, some day," he replied vaguely; "but I have had the suit put away for some time. Who knows when I will go down into the sea again? Be careful in that small skiff," he warned the girls. "There are so many launches about on these waters, run by men and women that don't know the very first principles of running a boat, that a small craft like yours may easily drift into danger. You must look lively."

The girls waved their good-byes as Madge and Phil pulled away. Madge noticed that the old sailor stared curiously at her, and every now and then he shook his head and frowned. Madge supposed it was because she had been so bold as to ask a favor of a perfect stranger. Yet, if she could only see Captain Jules again and he might be persuaded to show her his diving suit and to tell her something of the strange business of pearl-fishing, she couldn't be really sorry for her impudence. This accidental meeting with an old sailor inspired Madge afresh with her love of the sea and the mystery of it. She could not get the man out of her mind, nor her own desire to see him soon again and to ask him more questions.

As for Captain Jules, when the girls had fairly gone he lighted his pipe and strode along the line of the shore. "It's a funny thing, Madge," he said, addressing the monkey, "but when a man gets an idea in his head, everything and everybody he sees seems to start the same old idea a-going. I wish I had asked her to tell me her surname. I wonder if she is the real Madge?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE WRECK OF THE "WATER WITCH"

THE girls began their row to the "Merry Maid" with all speed. They had had such an interesting morning that they did not realize how the time had flown. They did not know the exact hour now, but they feared it would be after twelve before they could rejoin Miss Jenny Ann. The sun was so nearly overhead and shining so brilliantly that the effect was almost dazzling. Madge and Phil did not try to see any distance ahead in their course. Lillian, however, was on the look-out. There were several inlets opening into the larger water-way down which the girls were rowing. Boats were likely to come unexpectedly out of these inlets, and the girls should have been far more watchful than they were.

"It's too bad about Mrs. Curtis and Tom not coming on to Cape May as soon as we expected them, isn't it?" remarked Phil, resting for half a moment from the strain of the steady pulling at her oars. "I hope they will arrive soon, before we have the responsibility of entertaining Mrs. Curtis's friend, Philip Holt. It won't be much fun to have a strange man following us

about everywhere, even if he should turn out to be nicer than we think he is." Phil was the stroke oar. She was talking over her shoulder to Madge, who was paying more attention to her friend's conversation than to her rowing.

"Oh, I think Mrs. Curtis and Tom will be along soon," she rejoined. "I felt dreadfully when we received the telegram this morning. But now I hope Mrs. Curtis's brother will get well in a hurry. Perhaps they will be here almost as soon as this Philip. I'll wager you a pound of chocolates, Phil, that this goody-goody young man can't swim or row, or do anything like an ordinary person. He will just think every single thing we do is perfectly dreadful, and will frighten Tania to death with his preaching. I know he thinks her fairy stories are lies. He told Mrs. Curtis that Tania never spoke the truth." Madge lowered her voice. "I am sure we have never caught her in a lie. I suppose this Philip will think my exaggerations are as bad as Tania's fairy stories. I hate too literal people."

"Dear me, whom are you and Phil discussing, Madge?" inquired Lillian, leaning over from her seat in the stern with Tania, to try to catch her friends' low-voiced conversation. "If it is that Philip Holt, you need not think that he will trouble us very much when he comes to Cape

May. He is just the kind of person who will trot after all the rich people he meets, and waste very little energy on those who have neither money nor social position."

Lillian was looking at Madge and Phil as she talked. For the moment she forgot to keep a sharp watch about on the water. But a moment since there had been no other boats in sight near them. Eleanor was resting in the prow with her eyes closed. The sun blazed hotly in her face, she could only see a bright light dancing before her eyes.

As Lillian leaned back in her seat in the stern her face took on an expression of sudden alarm. At the same moment the four girls heard the distinct chug of a motor engine. Cutting down upon them was a pleasure yacht run by a gasoline motor. The prow of the yacht was head-on with the "Water Witch" and running at full speed. The boat had blown no whistle, so the girls had not seen its approach.

"Look ahead!" shouted Lillian.

The young man who was steering the yacht paid no heed to her warning. He kept straight ahead, although he distinctly saw the rowboat and its passengers.

Madge and Phyllis had no time to call out or to protest. They realized, almost instantly, that the motor launch meant to make no effort to

slow down but to put the full responsibility of getting out of danger on the rowers.

The girls had no particular desire to be thrown into the water, nor to have their boat cut in two, so they pulled for dear life, with white faces and straining throats and arms.

They just missed making their escape by a hair's breadth. The young man running the yacht must have believed that the skiff would get safely by or else when he found out his mistake it was too late for him to slow down. The prow of his yacht ran with full force into the frail side of the "Water Witch" near her stern.

The little skiff whirled in the water almost in a semi-circle. By a miracle it escaped being completely run down by the launch. Yet a second later, before any one of the girls could stir, the water rushed into the hole in its side and it sank. Madge and Phyllis had had their oars wrenched from their hands. Then they found themselves struggling in the water.

A cry rose from the launch as the "Water Witch" and her passengers disappeared. But there was no sound from the little rowboat, save the gurgle of the water and a shrill scream from Tania as the waves closed over her head.

The yacht swept on past, borne perhaps by her own headway.

As Madge went down under the water two

thoughts seemed to come to her mind in the same second: she must look after Eleanor and Tania. Her cousin, Nellie, was not able to swim as well as the other girls. She had always been more nervous and timid in the water and was liable to sudden cramp. Madge knew that being hurled from a boat in such sudden fashion with her clothes on instead of a bathing suit would completely terrify Eleanor. She might lose her presence of mind completely and fail to strike out when she rose to the surface of the water. As for Tania, Madge was aware that she, of course, could not swim a stroke. The little one had never been in deep water before in her life.

Madge struggled for breath for a second as she came to the surface of the bay again. She had swallowed some salt water as she went down. In the next desperate instant she counted three heads above the waves besides her own. Phyllis was swimming quietly toward Eleanor. Evidently she had entertained Madge's fear. "Make for the 'Water Witch,' Nellie," Madge heard Phil say in her calm, cool-headed fashion. "It has overturned and come up again and we can hang on to that. Don't be frightened. I am coming after you. Try to float if your clothes are too heavy to swim. I'll pull you to the boat."

Lillian's golden head reflected the light

from the sun's rays as she swam along after Phil. But nowhere could Madge see a sign of a little, wild, black head with its straight, short locks and frightened black eyes.

She waited for another breathless moment. Why did Tania not rise to the surface like the rest of them? Madge was trying to tread water and to keep a sharp lookout about her, but her clothes were heavy and kept pulling her down; swimming in heavy shoes is an extremely difficult business, even for an experienced swimmer. All of a sudden it occurred to Madge that Tania might have risen under the overturned rowboat. Then her head would have struck against its bottom and she would have gone down again without ever having been seen.

There was nothing else to be done. Madge must dive down to see what had become of her little friend, yet diving was difficult when she had no place from which to dive. Madge knew she must get all the way down to the very bottom of the bay to see if by any chance Tania's body could have been entangled among the sea weed, or her clothes caught on a rock or snag.

Once down, she looked in vain for the little body along the sandy bottom of the bay. She espied some rocks covered with shimmering shells and sea ferns, but there was no trace of Tania. For the second time she rose to the sur-

face of the water. She hoped to see Tania's black head glistening among those of her older friends clustered about the overturned boat. She had grown very tired and was obliged to shake the water out of her eyes before she dared trust herself to look.

Then she saw that Phil had hold of one of Eleanor's hands and with the other was clinging to the slippery side of their overturned boat. Eleanor was numb with cold and shock. Although her free hand rested on the boat, Phil dared not let go of her for fear she would sink.

Phyllis was beginning to feel uneasy about Madge. She had given no thought to her during the early part of the accident, she knew Madge to be a water witch herself, but when the little captain did not come to the skiff with the rest of them Phil's heart grew heavy. What could she do? Dare she let go her hold on Eleanor? Strangely enough, in their peril, Phyllis had given no thought to the little stranger, Tania.

Phyllis Alden breathed a happy sigh of relief when she saw Madge's curly, red-brown head moving along toward them.

"Have you seen Tania?" she called faintly, trying to reserve both her breath and her strength.

Then Phil remembered Tania with a rush of

remorse and terror. "No, I haven't, Madge. What could have become of the child?" she faltered.

Lillian looked out over the water. Surely the launch that had wrecked them would have been able by this time to come back to their assistance. The boat had stopped, but it had not moved near to them. So far, its crew showed no sign of giving them any aid. Lillian could not believe her eyes.

"I'd better dive for Tania again," said Madge quietly, without intimating to her chums that she was feeling a little tired and less sure of herself in the water than usual. She knew they would not allow her to dive.

When she went down for Tania the second time she chose a different place to make her descent. She must find the little girl at once.

She was swimming along, not many inches from the bottom of the bay, when she caught sight of what seemed to her a large fish floating near some rocks. Madge swam toward it slowly. It was Tania's foot, swaying with the motion of the water. Caught on a spar, which might have once been part of a mast of an old ship, was Tania's dress. On the other side of her was a rock, and her body had become wedged between the two objects. It was a beautiful place and might have been a cave for a mer-

maid, but it held the little earth-princess in a death-like grasp.

It is possible to be sick with fear and yet to be brave. Madge knew her danger. She saw that Tania's dress was caught fast. She would have to tug at it valiantly to get it away. First, she pulled desperately at Tania's shoe, hoping she could free her body. A suffocating weight had begun to press down on her chest. She could hear a roaring and buzzing in her ears. She knew enough of the water to realize that she had been too long underneath; she should rise to the surface again to get her breath. But she dared not wait so long to release Tania. Nor did she know that she could find the child again when she returned. She must do her work now.

So Madge pulled more slowly and carefully at Tania's frock, unwinding it from the spar that held it. With a few gentle tugs she released it and Tania's slender body rose slowly. The child's eyes were closed, her face was as still and white as though she were dead. Madge was glad of Tania's unconsciousness. She knew that in this lay the one chance of safety for herself and the child. If Tania came to consciousness and began to struggle the little captain knew that her strength was too far gone for her to save either the child or herself. She would not

leave her. She would have to drown with her.

She caught the little girl by her black hair, and swam out feebly with her one free arm. At this moment Tania's black eyes opened wide. She realized their awful peril. She was only a child, and the fear of the drowning swept over her. She gave a despairing clutch upward, threw both her thin arms about Madge's neck and held her in a grasp of steel. For a second Madge tried to fight Tania's hands away. Then her strength gave out utterly. She realized that the end had come for them both.

CHAPTER IX

THE OWNER OF THE DISAGREEABLE VOICE

IT may be that Madge had another second of consciousness. Afterward she thought she could recall being caught up by a giant, who unloosed Tania's hands from about her throat. Quietly the three of them began to float upward with such steadiness, such quietness, that she had that blessed sense of security and release from responsibility that a child must feel who has fallen asleep in its father's arms.

The first thing that she actually knew was, when she opened her eyes, to look into a pair of deep blue, kindly ones that were smiling bravely and encouragingly into hers. Near her were her three friends, looking very wet and miserable, and one little, dark-eyed elf who was sobbing bitterly. Farther away were two strange girls and one red-faced young man. Then Madge understood that she had been brought aboard the yacht that had run down their rowboat.

The little captain sat up indignantly. "I am quite all right," she said haughtily, looking with an unfriendly countenance at their wreckers. Then, feeling strangely dizzy, she sank back and with a little sigh closed her eyes.

"Don't do that," protested Eleanor tragically. "You must not faint. Captain Jules, please don't let her."

The old captain's strong hands took hold of Madge's cold ones. "Pull yourself together, my hearty," he whispered. "A girl who can dive down into the bottom of the bay as you can shows she has good sea-blood in her. She can see the old captain's diving suit any day she likes—own it if she has a mind to. Fishing for pearls isn't half so good a trade as fishing for a human life. You'll be yourself in a minute. Lucky I happened to walk down the beach in the same direction your boat went."

One of the two strange girls came to Madge's side at this moment with a cup of strong tea. "*Do* drink this," she pleaded. "It has taken some time to make the water boil. I wish to give some to the other girls, too. I am so sorry that we ran into you. You must know that it was an accident."

Madge drank the tea obediently, gazing a little less scornfully at the girl who was serving her, her face pale with fright and sympathy. The other girl stood apart at a little distance with a young man. They were both staring at the wet and shivering girls with poorly concealed amusement.

"We are awfully sorry to give you so much

trouble," said Madge to the girl with the tea. She was trying to control her feelings when she caught sight of the owner of the small yacht and his friend and her temper got the better of her.

"I am sorry," she repeated, "that we are giving *you* trouble. But, really, your motor launch had no right to bear down on our boat without blowing its whistle or giving the faintest sign of its approach. It put the whole responsibility of getting out of the way on us."

Madge was sitting beside the old captain. Her direct mode of attack showed that she was feeling more like herself.

"What the young lady says is true," declared Captain Jules with emphasis. "I doubt if you have the faintest legal right to navigate a boat in these waters. If I hadn't happened to walk along down the shore of the bay after these young ladies left me two of them would have been drowned. I'll have to see to it that you keep off this bay if you do any more such mischief as you did this morning."

The young man in a handsome yachting suit worthy of an admiral in the United States Navy frowned angrily at Madge and her champion.

"I say it wasn't my fault that I ran into your little paper boat," he protested angrily. "I gave you plenty of time to get out of my way, but you girls pulled so slowly that we did slide into you.

Still, if you will admit that it was your fault and not mine, I will have your old skiff mended, if she isn't too much used up and you can get somebody to tow her back to land for you. I can't; I have enough to carry as it is."

The girl standing beside the young man giggled hysterically. Madge decided that she had heard her high, shrill notes before. Phyllis, Lillian and Eleanor were furiously angry at the young man's retort to Madge and Captain Jules, but they bit their lips and said nothing. They were on his yacht, although they were enforced passengers; it was better not to express their feelings.

But Madge was in a white heat of passion over the young man's boorish retort.

"It was not our fault in the least that we were run down," she said in a low, evenly pitched voice. "We are not willing to take the least bit of the blame. You not only ran into our little boat and sunk her, but you did not take the least trouble to come to our aid when you had not the faintest knowledge whether any one of us could swim. *Men* in the part of the world where I come from don't do things of that kind. Put your boat back and tow our rowboat to land," ordered Madge imperiously. "We certainly will not allow you to have it mended. Neither my friends nor I wish to accept any

kind of recompense from a man who is a *coward!*"

The word was out. Madge had not meant to use it, but somehow it slipped off her tongue.

"Steady," she heard the old sailor whisper in her ear. He was gazing at her intently, and something in his face calmed the hot tide of her anger. "I am sorry I said you were a coward," she added, with one of her quick repentances. "I don't think you were very brave, but perhaps something may have happened that prevented your coming to our aid."

"Mr. Dennis does not swim very well," the nicer of the two girls explained, sitting down beside Madge. She was blushing and biting her lips. "Mr. Dennis meant to put back as soon as he could. I am Ethel Swann. I received a letter from Mrs. Curtis this morning, who is one of my mother's old friends. She wrote that she and her son would be down a little later to open their cottage, but she hoped that we would meet you girls before she came. I am so sorry that we have met first in such an unfortunate fashion."

"Oh, never mind," interrupted Madge impatiently. "If you are Ethel Swann, Mrs. Curtis has talked to us about you. We are very glad to know you, I am sure."

"These are my friends, Roy Dennis and Ma-

bel Farrar," Ethel went on, her face flushing. The four girls bowed coldly. Mabel Farrar acknowledged the introduction by a stiff nod. The young man took off his cap for the first time when Madge introduced Captain Jules.

"Run your boat along the side of the overturned skiff and I'll tie her on for you," ordered Captain Jules quietly. "I think I had better go along back to land with you."

Roy Dennis, who was a little more frightened at his deed than he cared to own, was glad to obey the captain's order.

Just as the girls were landing from the launch Mabel Farrar's foot slipped and she gave a shrill scream. Instantly the girls recognized the voice which they had heard the night before condemning them to social oblivion.

Although Captain Jules had only a short time before positively refused the invitation of the girls to come aboard the "Merry Maid" to pay them a visit, it was he who handed each girl from the deck of Roy Dennis's boat into the arms of their frightened chaperon. Finally he crossed over to the deck of the houseboat himself, bearing little Tania in his arms and looking in his wet tarpaulins like old King Neptune rising from the brine.

Captain Jules was made to stay to luncheon on board the houseboat. There was no getting

away from the determined young women. In his heart of hearts the old sailor had no desire to go. Something inspired him with the desire to know more of these charming girls.

When the girls had put on dry clothing they led Captain Jules all over the houseboat, showing him each detail of it. He insisted that the "Merry Maid" was as trim a little craft as he had ever seen afloat.

After luncheon, at which the captain devoured six of Miss Jenny Ann's best cornbread gems, he sat down in a chair on the houseboat deck, holding Tania in his arms. He talked most to Phyllis, but he seldom took his eyes off Madge's face. Sometimes he frowned at her; now and then he smiled. Once or twice Madge found herself blushing and wondering why her rescuer looked at her so hard, but she was too interested to care very much.

She sat down in her favorite position on a pile of cushions on the deck, with her head resting against Miss Jenny Ann's knee and her eyes on the water. "Do tell us, Captain Jules," she pleaded, "something about your life as a pearl-fisher. You must have had wonderful experiences. We would dearly love to hear about them, wouldn't we, girls?"

The girls chorused an enthusiastic "Yes," which included Miss Jenny Ann.

Captain Jules laughed. "Haven't you ever heard that it is dangerous to get an old sea dog started on his adventures? You never can tell when he will leave off," he teased, stroking Tania's black hair. "But I wouldn't be surprised if Tania would like to hear how once I was nearly swallowed whole, diving suit and all, by a giant shark. I was hunting for pearls in those days off the Philippine Islands. I had been tearing some shells from the side of a great rock when, of a sudden, I felt a strange presence before I saw anything. I might have known it was time to expect trouble, because the little fish that are usually floating about in the water had all disappeared. A creepy feeling came over me. I was cold as ice inside my diving suit. Then I turned and looked up. Just a few feet in front of me was a giant shark that seemed about twenty-five feet long. He was an evil monster. The upper part of his body was a dirty, dark green and his fins were black. You never saw a diving suit, did you? So you don't know that all the body is covered up but the hands. I tucked my hands under my breastplate in a hurry. It didn't seem to me that a pearl diver would be much good without any hands. Well, the great fish made a sweep with its tail, and in a jiffy he and I were face to face. I stood still for about a second. I held my breath, my

heart pounding like a hammer. Nearer and nearer the monster came swimming toward me, with its shovel nose pointing directly at the glass that covered my face. I couldn't stand it. I threw up my hands. I yelled way down at the bottom of the sea with no one to hear me. There was a swirl of water, a cloud of mud, and my enemy vanished. He didn't like the noise any better than I liked him."

The girls breathed sighs of relief. The captain chuckled. "Oh, a diver is not in real danger from a shark," he went on, "his suit protects him. But there are plenty of other dangers. Maybe I'll tell you some of them at another time. Why, I declare, it is nearly sunset. You don't know it, children, but the bottom of the tropic sea has colors in it as beautiful as the lights in that sky. The sea-bottom, where the diver is apt to find pearl shells, is covered with all sorts of sea growths—sponges twelve feet high, coral cups like inverted mushrooms, sea-fans twenty feet broad."

As the old diver talked, the girls could see the magic coral wreaths, glowing rose color and crimson, the tall ferns and sea flowers that waved with the movement of the water as the earth flowers move to the stirring of the wind. And there in the land of the mermaids, hidden between wonderful shells of mother-of-pearl, lie

the jewels that are the purest and most beautiful in the world.

Madge's chin was in her hands. She did not hear the old captain get up and say good-bye. She was wishing, with all her heart, that she, too, might go down to the bottom of the sea to view its treasures.

"Madge," Phil interrupted her reverie, "Captain Jules is going."

Madge put her soft, warm hands into the big man's hard, powerful ones. "Good-bye," she said gratefully. "There is something I wish to tell you, but I won't until another time."

Miss Jenny Ann stared thoughtfully after the giant figure as Captain Jules left the houseboat and strode up the shore in search of a small skiff to take him home.

"You girls have made an unusual friend," she said slowly to Madge. "In many ways Captain Jules is rough. He may be uneducated in the wisdom of schools and books, but he is a great man with a great heart."

Before Madge went to bed that night she wrote Tom Curtis. She told him how sorry they all were that he could not come at once to Cape May. She also described the day's adventures. She made as light of their accident as possible, but she ended her letter by asking Tom if he would not send her a book about pearl fishing.

CHAPTER X

THE GOODY-GOODY YOUNG MAN

"PHILIP HOLT has come, Madge," announced Phyllis Alden a few days later. "He is staying at one of the hotels until Mrs. Curtis and Tom arrive to open their cottage. He has already been calling on a number of Mrs. Curtis's friends here. Now he has condescended to come to see us. Miss Jenny Ann says we must invite him to luncheon; so close that book, if you please, and come help us to entertain him. I am sure you will be *so* pleased to see him."

Madge frowned, but closed her book obediently. "What a bore, Phil! I was just reading this fascinating book on pearl-fishing. A few valuable pearls have been found in these waters. There was one which was sold to a princess for twenty-five hundred dollars. Who knows but the 'Merry Maid' may even now be reposing on a bank of pearls! Dear me, here is that tiresome Mr. Holt! Of course, we must be nice with him on Mrs. Curtis's account. I hope she and Tom will soon come along. Let us take Mr. Holt with us to the golf club this afternoon. We

promised Ethel Swann to come and she won't mind our bringing him.''

The girls were not altogether surprised that the young people whom they had lately met at Cape May were divided into two sets. The one had taken the girls under their protection and seemed to like them immensely. The other, headed by Mabel Farrar and Roy Dennis, treated them with cool contempt. But the girls felt able to take care of themselves. No one of them even inquired what story Mr. Dennis and Miss Farrar had told about their memorable meeting on the water.

The Cape May golf course stretches over miles of beautiful downs and the clubhouse is the gathering place for society at this summer resort.

Ethel Swann bore off Lillian and Eleanor to introduce them to some of her friends, and the three girls followed the course of two of the players over the links.

Philip Holt was plainly impressed by the smartly-dressed women and girls whom he saw about him. He was a tall, thin young man with sandy hair and he wore spectacles. He insisted that Madge and Phyllis should not forget to introduce him as the friend of Mrs. Curtis, who expected him to be her guest later on. Indeed, Philip Holt talked so constantly and so inti-

mately of Mrs. Curtis that Madge had to stifle a little pang of jealousy. She had supposed, when she was in New York City, that Mrs. Curtis, who was very generous, only took a friendly interest in Philip Holt and his work among the New York poor, but to-day Philip Holt gave her to understand that Mrs. Curtis was as kind to him as though he were a member of her family. And Madge wondered wickedly to herself whether Tom Curtis would be pleased to have him for a brother. She determined to interview Tom on the subject as soon as he should return from Chicago.

Later in the afternoon Madge and Phyllis were surprised to see Roy Dennis and Mabel Farrar come down the golf clubhouse steps and walk across the lawn toward them, smiling with apparent friendliness. Madge's resentful expression softened. She did not bear malice, and she felt that she had said more to Roy Dennis about his treatment of them than she should have done. She, therefore, bowed pleasantly. Phil followed suit. To their amazement they were greeted with a frozen stare by the newcomers, who walked to where the two girls were standing without paying the least attention to the latter. Madge's color rose to the very roots of her hair. Phil's black eyes flashed, but she kept them steadily fixed on the girl and man.

"How do you do, Mr. Holt?" asked Mabel in bland tones, addressing the girls' companion. "I believe I am right in calling you Mr. Holt. I have heard that you were a friend of Mrs. Curtis and her son. This is my friend, Roy Dennis. We are so pleased to meet any of dear Mrs. Curtis's *real* friends. We should like to have you take tea with us."

Philip Holt looked perplexed. He opened his mouth to introduce Madge and Phyllis to Miss Farrar, but the girls' expressions told the story.

Miss Farrar and Mr. Dennis had purposely excluded the two girls from the conversation.

For the fraction of a second Philip Holt wavered. Mabel Farrar was smartly dressed. Roy Dennis looked the rich, idle society man that he was. Moneyed friends were always the most useful in Mr. Holt's opinion, he therefore turned to Miss Farrar with, "I shall be only too pleased to accompany you."

"You'll excuse me," he turned condescendingly to Madge and Phil, "but Mrs. Curtis's friends wish me to have tea with them."

Madge smiled at the young man with such frank amusement that he was embarrassed. "Oh, yes, we will excuse you," she said lightly. "Please don't give another thought to us. Miss Alden and I wish you to consult your own pleasure. I am sure that you will find it in drinking

tea!" She turned away, the picture of calm indifference, although she had a wicked twinkle in her eye.

"Well, if that wasn't the rudest behavior all around that I ever saw in my life!" burst out Phil indignantly after the disagreeable trio had departed. "Mrs. Curtis or no Mrs. Curtis, I don't think we should be expected to speak to that ill-bred Mr. Holt again. The idea of his marching off with that girl and man after the way they treated us! I shall tell Mrs. Curtis just how he behaved as soon as I see her, then she won't think him so delightful."

Madge put her arm inside Phil's. "You had better not mention it to Mrs. Curtis, Phil. Mrs. Curtis is the dearest person in the world, but she is so lovely and so rich that she is used always to having her own way. She thinks that we girls are prejudiced against this Mr. Holt because he said the things he did about Tania. By the way, I wonder what the little witch has against him? I mean to ask her some day. But let's not trouble about Philip Holt any more. He is just a toady. I don't care what he says or does. We have done our duty by him for this afternoon at least. He won't join us again. Let's go over to that lovely hill and have a good, old-fashioned talk."

Phil's face cleared. After all, she and Madge

could get along much better without troublesome outsiders.

"Isn't it a wonderful afternoon, Phil?" asked the little captain after they had climbed the little hill and were seated on a grassy knoll. "We can see the ocean over there! Wouldn't you like to be swimming down there under the water, where it is so cool and lovely and there would be nothing to trouble one?"

"What a water-baby you are," smiled Phil, giving her chum's arm a soft pressure. "I sometimes think that you must have come out of a sea-shell. I suppose you are thinking of the old pearl diver again."

"Phil," demanded Madge abruptly, "have you ever thought of what profession you would have liked to follow if you had been born a boy instead of a girl?"

"I do not have to think to answer that," replied Phyllis, "I know. If I were a boy, I should study to become a physician, like my father; but even though I am a girl, I am going to study medicine just the same. As soon as we get through college I shall begin my course."

"Phil," Madge's voice sounded unusually serious, "don't set your heart too much, dear, on my going to college with you in the fall. I don't know it positively, but I think that Uncle is having some business trouble. He and Aunt have

been worried for the past year about some stocks they own. I shan't feel that I have any right to let them send me to college unless I can make up my mind that I shall be willing to teach to earn my living afterward. And I can't teach, Phil, dear. I should never make a successful teacher," ended Madge with a sigh.

"I can't imagine you as a teacher," smiled Phil, "but I am sure that you will marry before you are many years older."

"Marry!" protested Madge indignantly. "Why do you think I shall marry? Why, I was wishing this very minute that I were a man so that I could set out on a voyage of discovery and sail around the world in a little ship of my own. Or, think, one might be a pearl-diver, or lead some exciting life like that. Now, Phil Alden, don't you go and arrange for me just to marry and keep house and never have a bit of fun or any excitement in my whole life!"

Phyllis laughed teasingly. "Oh, you will have plenty of excitement, Madge dear, wherever you are or whatever you do. Don't you remember how Miss Betsey used to say that she knew something was going to happen whenever you were about? I suppose you would like to be a captain in the Navy like your father, so that you could spend all your time on the sea."

"No," returned Madge, "I should want a

ship of my own. I wouldn't like to be a captain in the Navy. There, you always have to do just what you are told to do, and you know, Phil, that obedience is not my strong point." The little captain laughed and shook her russet head. "You see, Phil, I think that if I could go around the world, perhaps in some far-away land I would find my father waiting for me."

For several minutes the two chums were silent. At last Phil leaned forward and gave Madge's arm a gentle pinch. "Wake up, dear," she laughed, "perhaps some day you will own that little ship and go around the world in it. Just now, however, we had better go on to the houseboat. I believe Nellie and Lillian are going to wait at the golf club until the last mail comes in, so they can bring our letters along home with them. We must say good-bye to that nice Ethel Swann. She is a dear, in spite of her ill-bred friends."

Phyllis and Madge found Miss Jenny Ann sitting in a steamer chair on the houseboat deck exchanging fairy stories with Tania. The little girl knew almost as many as did her chaperon, but Tania's stories were so full of her own odd fancies that it was hard to tell from what source they had come.

"Do you know the story of 'The Little Tin Soldier,' Tania?" Miss Jenny Ann had just

asked. "He was the bravest little soldier in the world, because he bore all kinds of misfortunes and never complained."

With a whirl Tania was out of Miss Jenny Ann's lap and into Madge's arms. The child was devoted to each member of the houseboat party, but she was Madge's ardent adorer. She liked to play that she was the little captain's Fairy Godmother, and that she could grant any wish that Madge might make.

Phil, Madge and Tania sat down at Miss Jenny Ann's feet to hear more about "The Brave Little Tin Soldier." Tania huddled close to Madge, her black head resting against the older girl's curls, as she listened to the harrowing adventures that befel the Tin Soldier.

The sun was sinking. Away over the water the world seemed rose colored, but the shadows were deepening on the land. Phil espied Lillian and Eleanor coming toward the houseboat. Lillian waved a handful of white envelopes, but Eleanor walked more slowly and did not glance up toward her friends.

Miss Jenny Ann rose hurriedly. "I must go in to see to our dinner," she announced. "Phil, after you have spoken to the girls, will you come in to help me? Madge may stay to look after Tania."

The little captain was absorbed in a quiet twi-

light dream, and as Tania was in her lap she did not get up when Phil went forward to meet Lillian and Eleanor.

Instantly Phil realized that something was the matter with Nellie. Eleanor's face was white and drawn and there were tears in her gentle, brown eyes. Lillian also looked worried and sympathetic, but was evidently trying to appear cheerful.

"What is the matter, Eleanor? Has any one hurt your feelings?" asked Phil immediately. Eleanor was the youngest of the girls and always the one to be protected. Phyllis guessed that perhaps some one of the unpleasant acquaintances of Roy Dennis and Mabel Farrar might have been unkind to her.

But Eleanor shook her head dumbly.

"Nellie has had some bad news from home," answered Lillian, tenderly putting her arm about Eleanor. "Perhaps it isn't so bad as she thinks."

Madge overheard Lillian's speech and, lifting Tania from her lap, sprang to her feet.

"Nellie, darling, what is it? Tell me at once!" she demanded. "If Uncle and Aunt are ill, we must go to them at once."

"It isn't so bad as that, Madge," answered Eleanor, finding her voice; "only Mother has written to tell us that Father has lost a great

deal of money. He has had to mortgage dear old 'Forest House,' and if he doesn't get a lot more money by fall, 'Forest House' will have to be sold."

Nellie broke down. The thought of having to give up her dear old Virginia home, that had been in their family for five generations, was more than she could bear.

Madge kissed Eleanor gently. In the face of great difficulties Madge was not the harum-scarum person she seemed. "Don't worry too much, Nellie," she urged. "If Uncle and Aunt are well, then the loss of the money isn't so dreadful. Somehow, I don't believe we shall have to give up 'Forest House.' It would be too frightful! Perhaps Uncle will find the money in time to save it, or we shall get it in some way. I am nearly grown now. I ought to be able to help. Anyhow, I don't mean to be an expense to Uncle and Aunt any more after this summer." Madge's face clouded, although she tried to conceal her dismay. "Do Uncle and Aunt want us to leave the houseboat and come home at once?"

Phil's and Lillian's faces were as long and as gloomy as their other chums' at this suggestion.

But Eleanor shook her head firmly. "No; Father says positively that he does not wish us to leave the houseboat until our holiday is over.

It is not costing us very much and he wishes us to have a good time this summer, so that we can bear whatever happens next winter."

No one had noticed little Tania while the houseboat girls were talking. Her eyes were bigger and blacker than ever, and as Madge turned to go into the cabin she saw that there were tears in them.

"What is it, Tania?" putting her arms about the quaint child.

"Did you say that you didn't have all the money you wanted?" inquired Tania anxiously. "I didn't know that people like you ever needed money. I thought that all poor people lived in slums and took in washing like old Sal."

Madge laughed. "I don't suppose the people in the tenements are as poor as we are sometimes, Tania, because they don't need so many things. But don't worry your head about me, little Fairy Godmother. I am sure that you will bring me good luck."

CHAPTER XI

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE

"MADGE, I am afraid that you and the girls are not having as good a time at Cape May as I had hoped you would have," remarked Mrs. Curtis to the little captain about a week later as they strolled along the beautiful ocean boulevard that overlooked the sea. Only the day before Mrs. Curtis and Tom had returned from Chicago. Just behind them, Lillian, Miss Jenny Ann, Phyllis, Tom Curtis and Mrs. Curtis's protégé, Philip Holt, loitered along the beach. They were too far away to overhear the conversation of the two women.

"On the contrary, we are having a perfectly beautiful time," answered Madge, her face radiant with the pleasure of her surroundings. "I think Cape May is one of the loveliest places in the whole world! And we girls have met the most splendid old sea captain. He has the dearest, snuggest little house up the bay! He was once a deep-sea diver and knows the most fascinating stories about the treasures of the sea." Madge ceased speaking. She could tell from her friend's slightly bored expression that Mrs.

Curtis was not interested in the story of a common sailor.

"Yes, Madge, I know about all that," Mrs. Curtis returned a little coldly. "What I meant is that I fear you girls are not enjoying the social life of Cape May, which is what I looked forward to for you. I do wish, dear, that you cared more for society and less for such people as this old sailor and a tenement child like Tania. I doubt if this man is a fit associate for you."

Madge's blue eyes darkened. She thought of the splendid old sailor, with his great strength and gentle manners, his knowledge of the world and his fine simplicity, and of queer, loving little Tania, but she wisely held her peace. "I am sorry, too, that I don't like society more if you wish it," she replied sweetly. "I *do* like the society of clever, agreeable people, but not—— I like Ethel Swann and her friends immensely," she ended. "And, please, don't say anything against my old pearl diver, Mrs. Curtis, until you see him. I am sure that you and Tom will think that he is splendid."

Mrs. Curtis looked searchingly at Madge, and Madge returned her gaze without lowering her eyes. Mrs. Curtis's face softened. She found it hard to scold her favorite, but she had been very much vexed at the story that Philip Holt

had repeated to her of Madge's escapades at Cape May, and how she accused Roy Dennis of cowardice when he had taken her and her friends on his boat after Madge's and Phil's own heedlessness had caused their skiff to be overturned. Somehow, the tale of the throwing of the ball on board Roy Dennis's yacht and of frightening Mabel Farrar had also gone abroad in Cape May. Lillian had confided the anecdote to Ethel Swann under promise of the greatest secrecy. The story had seemed to Ethel too ridiculous to keep to herself, so she had repeated it to another friend, after demanding the same promise that Lillian had exacted from her. And so the story had traveled and grown until it was a very mischievous tale that Philip Holt had recounted to Mrs. Curtis, taking care that Tom Curtis was not about when he told it.

Mrs. Curtis thought Madge too old for such practical jokes. She also believed that Madge should have more dignity and self-control. She loved her very dearly, and she wished her to come to live with her as her daughter after her own daughter, Madeleine, had married, but Mrs. Curtis was determined that the little captain should learn to be less impetuous and more conventional.

"Philip Holt has told you something about me, hasn't he, Mrs. Curtis?" asked Madge

meekly, hiding the flash in her eyes by lowering her lids.

"Philip told me very little. He is the soul of honor," answered Mrs. Curtis quickly. "You are absurdly prejudiced against him. But with the little that he told me and what I have gathered from other sources, I feel that you have been most indiscreet. I can't help thinking that the various things that have happened may be laid at your door, and that the other girls have just stood by you, as they always do."

Madge bit her lips. "Whatever has occurred that you don't like is my fault, Mrs. Curtis," she confessed, "and Phil, Lillian and Nellie *have* stood by me. I am sorry that you are angry."

The other young people were coming closer. Not for worlds would Madge have had them overhear her conversation with Mrs. Curtis. She was too proud and too hurt to ask Mrs. Curtis just what Philip Holt had said against her. Neither would she retaliate against him by telling her friend of his rudeness.

Mrs. Curtis put one arm about Madge. "It is all right, my dear," she said, softening a little, "but you must promise me that you will not do such harum-scarum things again, and that you will try to keep your temper." Mrs. Curtis was on the point of asking Madge to give up her acquaintance with the sailor and not to see the

man again, but she knew that her young friend was feeling a little hurt and no doubt resentful toward her, so she put off making her request until a later time.

"Tania has behaved very well, so far, hasn't she, Madge?" Mrs. Curtis tactfully changed the subject. "I confess I am surprised. Philip Holt assured me that the child was continually in mischief in the tenement neighborhood where she lives. When he took her into the neighborhood house to try to help her she positively stole something. I am afraid Tania's mother was not the woman you think she was; she was only a cheap little actress, a dancer." Mrs. Curtis glanced at her companion. Madge was eyeing her seriously.

"It isn't like you, Mrs. Curtis, dear, to say things against people. Philip Holt must have——" Madge stopped abruptly. At the same time Tom Curtis came up from behind to join his mother and the girl.

"Come on, Madge, and have a race with me across the sands," he urged. "Mother will be trying to make you so grown-up that we can't have any sport at all. Besides, you are looking pale. I am sure you need exercise. There is a crowd over there in front of the music pavilion. I will wager a five-pound box of candy that I can beat you to it. Philip Holt will entertain

Mother. She likes him better than she does the rest of us, anyhow, because he devotes his time to good works and to working good people," added Tom teasingly, under his breath.

While Tom was talking Madge darted off across the sands. She never would get over her love of running, she felt sure, until she was old and rheumatic. The color came back to her cheeks and the laughter to her eyes.

Tom was close behind her. "Madge Morton, you didn't give me a fair start," he protested, "you rushed away before I was ready. I thought you always played fair?"

Madge dropped into a walk. "I do try to, Tom," she answered more earnestly than Tom had expected. His remark had been made only in fun. "You believe in me, don't you, Tom?" she added pleadingly.

"Now and forever, Madge, through thick and thin," answered Tom steadily.

They had now come up nearer the crowd of people on the beach. Up on a grand stand a band was playing an Italian waltz, and an eager crowd had gathered, apparently to listen to the music.

But the two young people soon saw that on the hard sand a child was dancing. Tom stopped outside the circle of watchers, but Madge went forward into it. She had at once recog-

nized little Tania! Eleanor had been left on the houseboat to take care of the child, but Eleanor was now nowhere to be seen, and her charge had wandered into mischief.

Tania was dancing in her most bewitching and wonderful fashion. Madge could not help feeling a little embarrassed pride in her. The child was moving like a flower swayed by the wind. She poised first on one foot, then on the other, then flitted forward on both pointed toes, her thin, eager arms outstretched, curving and bending with the rhythm of the music. She wore her best white dress, the pride of her life, which Eleanor had lately made for her. On her head she had placed a wreath of wild flowers, which she must have woven for herself. They were like a fairy crown on her dark head. With the love of bright colors, which she must have inherited from some Italian ancestor, she had twisted a bright scarlet sash about her waist.

Again Madge saw that Tania was utterly unconscious of the audience about her. She looked neither to the right nor to the left, but straight upward to the turquoise-blue sky.

How different Tania's audience to-day from the crowd of people that had watched her on the street corner when Eleanor and Madge had first seen her! Yet these gay society folk were even more fascinated by the child's wonderful art.

They could better appreciate her remarkable dancing.

Tania did not even see her beloved Madge, who was silently watching her. Tania's usually pale cheeks glowed as scarlet as her sash. Unconsciously the little girl's movements were like those of a butterfly, a-flutter with the joy of the sunshine and new life.

The music stopped suddenly and with it Tania's dance ceased as abruptly. She stood poised for a single instant on one dainty foot, with her graceful arms still swaying above her flower-crowned head. Her audience watched her breathlessly, for the effect of the child's grace had been almost magical.

"Wasn't that a wonderful performance?" whispered Tom in Madge's ear. "The child is an artist! Where do you suppose she learned to dance like that?"

But Tania had come back to earth in a brief second. To Madge's mystification, Tania started about among the people who had been watching her performance with her small hands clasped together like a cup.

The child courtesied shyly to a fat old lady. Her gesture was unmistakable. The woman rummaged in her chain pocket-book and dropped a silver quarter into Tania's outstretched hands. The next onlooker was more generous. Tania's

eyes shone as she felt the size and weight of a big silver dollar.

Few people in the Cape May crowd knew who Tania was, or whence she had come. They probably thought that the object of the dance had been to earn money.

For a few moments Madge had been paralyzed by Tania's peculiar actions. She did not realize what they meant. In this lapse of time the rest of their party joined them.

It was the expression on Mrs. Curtis's face that made Madge appreciate what Tania was doing.

"What on earth is Tania about?" exclaimed Lillian in puzzled tones. She saw the child standing before a young man who was evidently teasing her and refusing her request for money.

"She has been dancing like a monkey with a hand organ," answered Philip Holt scornfully. "I am afraid Cape May people will hardly understand it. It looks as though the young women on the 'Merry Maid' were in need of money." The young man laughed as though his last remark had been intended for a joke.

"None of that talk, Holt," Madge caught Tom's angry tone as she hurried forward to Tania. The little captain could have cried with mortification and embarrassment. In the crowd of curious onlookers she caught sight of Mabel

Farrar's and Roy Dennis's sneering faces.

"Tania!" she cried sharply. "What in the world are you doing? Stop taking that money at once!"

Tania glanced around and discovered Madge. Instead of looking ashamed of herself, the child's face grew radiant. "Madge," she cried, in a high voice that could be heard all about them, "it is all for you!"

Tania rushed forward with her outstretched hands overflowing with silver.

Madge could have sunk through the sands for shame. Mrs. Curtis's face flamed with anger and chagrin. She might have been able to explain to her friends that Tania was only a street child and knew no better than to dance for money; but how could she ever explain the remark to Madge? It looked as though Madge had been a party to Tania's dancing and begging.

Madge was overcome with embarrassment and humiliation. She knew that she must, for the minute, appear like a beggar to the crowd of Cape May people. For just that instant she would have liked to repulse Tania, to have thrust the child and her money away from her before every one. But a glance at Tania's eager, happy face restrained her. She put her arm protectingly about the little girl, hiding her

in the shelter of her body. "I don't want the money, Tania," she whispered. "It wasn't right for you to have taken it from these people."

"Don't you want it?" faltered Tania. "I thought you said last night that you and Eleanor were very poor, and that you needed some money very much. All the time I was in bed last night I thought of what your Fairy Godmother could do to help you. I know how to do but one thing—to dance as my mother taught me. How can it be wrong to take the money from people? I have often done it in New York. They only gave it to me because they liked my dancing." Madge could feel Tania's hot tears on her hands.

She clasped Tania closer. "It isn't exactly wrong, Tania; I was mistaken. It was just different. I will have to explain it to you afterward. Now we must give the money back to the people again."

Holding tight to Tania's hand, Madge walked among the group of strangers, explaining Tania's actions as best she could without hurting the little girl's feelings. It was one of the hardest things that the proud little captain had ever been called upon to do. But a part of the crowd had scattered. It was not possible to find them all and return their silver. Tania was too puz-

zled and heart-broken to continue her errand long. She did not understand why Madge had refused to take her gift, which she thought she had fairly earned. Finally she could hold back her sobs no longer. Dropping her few remaining nickels and dimes on the sand she broke away from Madge's clasp and ran like a little wild creature away from everyone.

Madge stopped for just a second among her friends before following Tania.

"You see, Madge," remarked Mrs. Curtis coldly, "Tania is quite impossible. I knew the child would get you into difficulties, and it is just as I feared. She must be sent away at once."

But Madge shook her head with a decision that was unmistakable.

"No," she answered quietly, "Tania shall not be sent away. None of you understand, and I can't explain it to you now, but Tania thought she was doing something for Nellie and me. She was foolish, of course, and I will see that she never does it again."

With her head held high, Madge hurried away in pursuit of her Fairy Godmother.

CHAPTER XII

"THE ANCHORAGE"

MADGE was alone in the "Water Witch," which had been mended and was as good as new. She had just come from an interview with Mrs. Curtis, in which she had tried to make her friend understand the reason for Tania's behavior of the day before. Mrs. Curtis, however, would not take the little captain's view of the matter. She dwelt on the fact that Tania had slipped away from the houseboat without letting Eleanor know of it, and that she was a naughty and disobedient child.

Madge also believed that Mrs. Curtis no longer loved her so dearly as in the early days of their acquaintance. The young girl was sure that some influence was being brought to bear to prejudice her friend against her. But what could she do? Philip Holt was trying to destroy the affection Mrs. Curtis felt for Madge in order to ingratiate himself. It looked as though he were going to succeed. Madge was too proud to ask questions or to accuse Philip Holt with deliberately trying to influence her friend against her. Although she was only a young girl, she realized that love does not

amount to very much in this world unless it has faith and sympathy behind it. So long as she had done nothing she knew to be wrong, and for which she should make an apology, she could only wait to see if Mrs. Curtis's affection would be restored to her or cease altogether.

As usual, when she was troubled, the impulse came to her to be alone on the water. She had explained to Miss Jenny Ann that she might be gone for several hours, so there was no immediate reason why she should return to the houseboat. The other girls were yachting with some Cape May friends.

Madge rowed her boat up the bay toward the home of the old sailor. She was not far from the very place where Captain Jules had rescued Tania and her a short while before. She thought of the strange-looking beam sticking up out of the sandy bottom of the bay on which Tania's dress had caught. It had certainly looked like the broken mast of an old ship. She determined to ask Captain Jules if any wrecks had recently occurred near that part of the bay, and concluded that she would row up to the sailor's house for the express purpose of asking him this question. Of course, this was only an excuse. She was deeply anxious to call on the old sailor again and, if possible, persuade him to keep his promise to her to show her his diving

suit, and to tell her more of his strange experiences at the bottom of the sea.

Captain Jules was sitting in his favorite place on the big rock just by the water in front of his house. He was mending the sail of his fishing boat.

Madge's boat came round a slight curve in the bay, dancing toward him. This time Captain Jules spied his guest and saluted her as he would have greeted a superior officer.

The little captain blushed prettily as she returned his salute in her best naval fashion.

The old captain looked hurriedly toward his small house. There was no sight or sound of any one about. He seemed uncomfortable for a moment, then his face cleared. His deep blue eyes gleamed and his mouth set squarely. "Coming ashore to make me a call, Miss Madge?" he asked invitingly.

Madge nodded. "If I shan't be in your way. You must let me just sit there on the rock by you. I have been reading a perfectly thrilling book about pearl-divers," she announced as soon as she was comfortably settled, "but none of the stories were as thrilling as the ones you told us. The book said that pearls had been found in New Jersey. I wonder if you have ever thought of diving down to the bottom of this bay to see if it holds any treasures?"

The sailor was studying the girl's face so earnestly that he forgot to answer her.

"Oh, yes, I have thought of it," he replied a little later, smiling at his guest. "A man never wholly forgets his trade. But what a taste you have for sea yarns, little lady! I half-way think, now, that if you had not been born a girl you might have followed the sea for your calling."

"I should have loved it best of anything in the world," answered Madge fervently, gazing at the beautiful expanse of sunny, blue water. "I never feel as much at home anywhere as I do on the sea. You see," she continued confidingly, "I have a reason for loving the water. My father was a sailor. He was a captain in the United States Navy once."

"'A captain in the United States Navy,'" Captain Jules repeated huskily. "I thought so. I thought so."

"Why?" asked Madge wonderingly.

Captain Jules pulled his needle slowly through a heavy piece of sail cloth. It must have stuck, he was so long about it, and his big hands fumbled it so clumsily.

"Oh, because of your liking for the water, Miss Madge," he returned quietly. "You see, there are two great loves born in the hearts of men and women that you never can get away

from. The one is the love of the soil and the other is the love of the sea. No matter what your life is, if you have those two passions in you, you've got to get back to the country or to the water when your chance comes. But why do you say that your father was once a captain in the United States Navy? Is he dead?"

"I am afraid so," replied Madge faintly. Of late she was beginning to believe that her uncle and aunt, Mrs. Curtis and all her older friends were right. If her father were not dead in all these long years, surely he would have tried to find her. He would have sought to discover some news of the daughter whom he had left when she was only a baby.

Captain Jules seemed about to say something, then changed his mind. He shook his great, shaggy, gray head and looked at Madge tenderly. "Is your mother living?" he inquired.

"No, she died soon after my father went away to join his ship on his last voyage," Madge went on sadly, her eyes filling with tears. She was half tempted to tell the old sailor her father's story, then decided to reserve it until some future day when she felt that she knew him better. In spite of her liking for the old sea captain, she realized that she had hardly known him long enough to make him her confidant.

Captain Jules continued to sew. He opened

his mouth to speak once or twice and then closed it again. Finally he asked Madge huskily, "What was your father's name, child?"

"Captain Robert Morton," replied Madge slowly. "He was from Virginia. If I knew him to be alive, I'd be the happiest girl in the world."

Captain Jules cast a peculiar glance in her direction which Madge did not see.

"My dear little mate," he said slowly, "some day a young man will come along who will be far more to you than any old father could have been. But what made your father go away? If he was a captain in the Navy, what made him resign his command?"

"I can't tell you that to-day, Captain Jules. Perhaps I'll tell you some day when I know you better; in fact, I am sure I shall tell you. Perhaps when I do tell you I shall ask you to do me a great favor. Perhaps I shall ask you to help me hunt for him. I'll tell you a secret. Uncle and Aunt have been good to me and I love them dearly, but I want my own father, and I can't, I won't, believe he is dead. That is, not until I have absolute proof."

"Little girl!" exclaimed Captain Jules in such a strange voice that Madge was startled, "I promise you that I'll help you find him." Then in a calmer tone of voice he said: "I told

you that I would show you my diver's suit. If you will wait on my porch I will go around inside the house to see if I can find it."

He rose hastily and disappeared into the house, leaving Madge to wonder why the few words she had spoken concerning her father had affected the old sea captain so strangely.

CHAPTER XIII

TANIA'S NEMESIS

CAPTAIN JULES was gone a long time, but Madge did not mind waiting for him. She loved the odd house with its roof shaped like three sails and its restful name, "The Anchorage."

When Captain Jules came back with the great suit his face was pale, almost haggard, but he was smiling good-humoredly. "Come, stand over here by this window while I show you my old togs. I haven't looked at this diving suit myself for several years."

Madge was too much interested in the diving dress to glance in at the captain's window to see if she could catch a glimpse of the inside of the snug little house that she had not yet been invited to enter.

The diving suit was much lighter than she had expected to find it. It weighed only about twenty pounds. It was made of water-proof material and had a large helmet of copper with great circular glasses in front that looked like goggle eyes.

Captain Jules explained that there were two lines with which the diver communicated with

the outside world. The one was the air line, and it was used to pump air down to the man below in the water. The life line was usually hitched around the diver's waist. This line was let out to any depth the diver required, and by pulling on it the diver could signal to the men who followed his course: one jerk, pull up; two, more air; three, lower the bag. Madge was utterly fascinated with the netted bag, made of rope, that Captain Jules showed her. He told her that the pearl-diver always carried a bag to hold the treasures that he finds at the bottom of the sea. To her vivid imagination, the empty bag was even now filled with shining pearls, the rarest treasures of the sea.

The young girl persuaded Captain Jules to let her dress up in his diver's suit, when she stumbled about the veranda in it, her gay laughter mingling with the captain's deep chuckles of delight.

"O Captain Jules!" she pleaded, "do take me down to the bottom of the sea with you. I have always wanted to be a mermaid, and this may be the only chance I shall ever have. 'Only divers know of things below, of water's green and fishes' sheen,' " she chanted gayly.

The old sea captain gazed at Madge, breathing a deep sigh of satisfaction. "I believe you have the courage to do it if I were to let you try," he

murmured. "It comes nearer to convincing me than anything else."

"Captain Jules," continued the girl earnestly, "please, please let's go down to the bottom of this bay. You could take me with you and then there wouldn't be any danger. We have been down together without diving suits and here we are safe and sound on land again! You said you thought there might be pearls in the oyster beds of this bay. We could look, at any rate. I saw the most wonderful things when I was searching for Tania. It seemed as though her dress was caught on the broken spar of an old ship, though, of course, I couldn't be sure. Have there been many wrecks in this bay? Do you suppose it was a ship's spar?"

"There are always wrecks on the water, child. And you mustn't be talking nonsense about diving down in this bay along with me," answered Captain Jules severely. He kept his eyes fastened on his diving suit with an affectionate gleam in them. "Maybe, though, I will make a diving party of one and go down in the bay alone. I'd give you the pearls I found down there."

Madge shook her head. "That wouldn't be fair," she said, setting her red lips together obstinately. Captain Jules, she felt sure, would be easy to manage. If he did any diving in the

Delaware Bay within the next few weeks, he must take her with him.

She wrote secretly to New York City to ask what a diver's suit would cost. She was discouraged by the answer, but she did not give up hope. She was also very careful not to let Miss Jenny Ann or Mrs. Curtis know anything of the wild scheme that was evolving in her head.

Almost every day the girls saw Captain Jules. Either they went up the bay to call on him, or he made a visit to the houseboat.

The old captain never invited the girls inside his house, but they had great frolics in his tidy yard. The captain explained that his house was not neat enough to be seen by young ladies, as it had only a man housekeeper.

Even Mrs. Curtis became a little less prejudiced against Captain Jules. She could not but confess that he was a fine old man, though she still did not see why Madge was so much attracted by him. But the girl bided her time. The four girls and their friends went off on long fishing trips with Captain Jules. Sometimes Mrs. Curtis, Tom, and their guest, Philip Holt, went with them. The enmity between Madge and Philip increased every day, nor did Madge any longer make much effort to conceal her dislike for him.

Philip Holt had a special reason for his dis-

like for Madge Morton. He had come to Cape May with the idea of making Mrs. Curtis do an important favor for him upon which his whole future depended. He feared that Madge, who looked upon him as a hypocrite, would find out his true character, tell her friend, and thus ruin his prospects.

A singular misfortune had befallen him. Who could have guessed that one of the few people who knew his real history, Tania, the little street child, would be picked up by the houseboat girls and brought to Cape May for the summer? Tania must not be allowed to betray him. If she did, Mrs. Curtis must not believe either Madge or Tania. The young man had to lay his plans carefully, but he was a born hypocrite and he meant to accomplish his end.

His first opportunity to further his cause came one morning when he and Mrs. Curtis were sitting on the veranda of her summer cottage. Tom had gone out sailing and was not expected back for several hours, so that Philip believed that the coast was clear. He began by telling Mrs. Curtis something of the charity work that he had recently done in New York City and so brought the subject about to Tania.

"Dear Mrs. Curtis, you are so generous," the young man said admiringly. "I have just learned that after the summer holiday is over you

intend to send Miss Morton's protégé, Tania, to a boarding school. It is so kind in you."

Mrs. Curtis shook her head. "Oh, no," she answered, "it is very little to do. Really, I don't see what else could be done with the child. She is very queer and not attractive to me, but Madge is fond of her and, as I am very fond of Madge, I shall do what is best for the little girl."

"Ah," murmured Philip Holt vaguely, "but do you feel sure that a boarding school is the best place for the girl? She is so unruly, so untruthful! I fear that she would give you a great deal of trouble and responsibility unless she were placed under greater restraint. I have wondered for some time what should be done for the child. She has caused a lot of mischief among the children on the street in her tenement section. It seems to me that she ought to be sent to some kind of an institution where she would be more closely watched—an asylum or home for incorrigible children."

Mrs. Curtis looked worried and bit her lips. "That is rather hard on the child, isn't it? Still, I could not undertake to be responsible for Tania's good behavior at school. She seems very hard to control. I will watch her more closely, and, if she shows more signs of untruthfulness, I shall have to consider your suggestion. However, I will talk the matter over with

Madge. I wish you would walk down to the houseboat for me and invite the girls to come up to the hotel for luncheon. I hope they are not off somewhere with Captain Jules. He seems to claim the greater share of their attention lately."

Philip Holt walked off, very well pleased with his interview. He had conveyed to Mrs. Curtis precisely the impression he had intended to convey.

Ever since his arrival at Cape May Philip Holt had wished to see little Tania alone. He had warned the child that she was not to behave as though she had ever seen him before, yet he was still afraid that she might make a confidante of Madge. He needed to make his threat to her more terrifying. He decided to find her and intimidate her so thoroughly that she would not dare betray her previous acquaintance with him.

There was but one person in the world of whom the queer, elf-like Tania was afraid. That person was Philip Holt! She had feared him since the day of her own mother's death, and the very thought of him was enough to fill her childish soul with terror.

Tania was playing alone on the sands near the houseboat at the time Mrs. Curtis and Philip Holt were discussing her future. Madge and

Miss Jenny Ann were inside the houseboat, within calling distance of Tania, but not where they could see her. The little girl had just built a house of shining pebbles and was gazing at it with a pleased smile when she heard a step near her on the sand. Tania stared up at Philip's thin, blonde face in terror-stricken silence.

"Tania," the young man asked harshly, "have you told any one down here that you have ever seen or known me before?"

Tania shook her head mutely.

"Remember, if you do, I am going to have you shut up in a big house with iron bars at the windows where you can never go out or see your friends any more," Philip Holt went on, keeping his voice lowered to a whisper.

Slowly Tania's black eyes dropped. She tried to be brave and to pretend that she did not care, but the loss of her freedom was the one thing that Tania feared with all her soul. If she were shut up somewhere, how could she ever talk to her fairies, or see the blue sky that she so loved? And now, to be parted from the girls forever was too dreadful! Indeed, she would not dare to tell what she knew. Philip Holt was sure of it.

It was at that moment that Madge slipped out on the houseboat deck to see if Tania were all right. To her surprise she saw that Philip Holt

was talking to the little girl. She had not thought that Philip Holt cared enough for children to waste a minute's time with them. She therefore wondered at his sudden interest in Tania. Madge walked quietly off the houseboat. She was wearing tennis shoes and her softly-shod feet made no sound. She caught one glimpse of Tania's mute, white face and stopped short in time to hear Philip say:

"Even if you do tell that old Sal is my mother, Tania, no one will believe you. She herself will deny it and help me to have you shut up," declared Philip Holt menacingly.

Madge caught each word as though it had been addressed to her. For Tania's sake, and because she knew that for many reasons it was wiser, she held her peace for the time being.

"How do you do, Mr. Holt?" she asked innocently. "I just saw you from the deck of the houseboat."

Philip Holt leaped to his feet. But Madge's eyes were so clear and serene, her face so calm, that it was utterly impossible she could have overheard him.

Philip delivered Mrs. Curtis's message and then left the two girls together. Madge dropped down on the sands by Tania and put her arm about her. "You need never tell me who Mr. Holt is, nor why you are afraid of him, Tania,"

she whispered; "I overheard what he said, and you need not be afraid. I will take care of you!"

"He is the Wicked Genii," faltered Tania, "who hated the Princess and wanted to drive her away from her kingdom in Fairyland."

"But he can't harm you, Tania, dear," comforted Madge. "He dare not try to take you away from us. I am going to tell Mrs. Curtis all about this Wicked Genii and if I'm not mistaken it will be he, not you who is sent away."

CHAPTER XIV

CAPTAIN JULES MAKES A PROMISE

LITTLE by little Madge was able to put together the whole story of Philip Holt's life. He was old Sal's son, and "Holt" was not his own name, but he rarely came near his mother, never gave her any help, and denied his relationship with her whenever it was necessary. When Philip Murphy was a small boy he had been taken into the home of a wealthy family named Holt, but he had never been legally adopted as their child. He was raised in luxury and had made a great many wealthy friends, and he had learned to love money more than anything else in the world. But his rich patrons would not allow him entirely to desert his own mother. Twice every month he was made to go to see old Sal Murphy in her tenement home on the East Side. Philip Holt, who now went by the name of his foster parents, fairly loathed these visits. It was because of his hatred of them that he began to take his spite out on Tania when he was a lad of about fifteen, and poor Tania a baby of only six years old.

Tania's mother had died in the same tenement where old Sal lived. There had been no

one who wanted the little girl, so old Sal had taken her, beaten and starved her, and made her useful in any way that she could.

When Philip Holt had grown to manhood his foster parents lost most of their money. A little later they died, leaving their foster son nothing. The young man had been used to luxury and rich friends, and he could not give them up, therefore he told his wealthy friends that because he had once been a poor boy he meant to devote his life to charity. He proposed to work among the New York poor and asked their cooperation. Large sums of money were given him to be used for charity, but Philip Holt believed too strongly in the theory that charity begins at home. Whenever it was possible he used a part of this money for himself. To make more, he began speculating in Wall Street. He lost two thousand, then five thousand dollars of the money that had been entrusted to him. For almost a year he had been the treasurer of a New York charitable organization, and the time was near at hand when he must give a report of the money that he had misused. He knew that disgrace, imprisonment, stared him in the face unless he could persuade Mrs. Curtis to advance him five thousand dollars for some charitable purpose, or give it to him for himself. He, therefore, did not intend to be balked in his plan by

either Madge or Tania, no matter what desperate measures he had to employ.

So there were two persons at Cape May who came to believe that they stood in dire need of money. Yet they wished it for very different reasons: Philip Holt wanted money to save himself from disgrace; Madge desired it to help her uncle and aunt save their old home, "Forest House," to send Eleanor back to graduate at Miss Tolliver's in the fall, to start on her search for her father, and, last of all, to take care of Tania.

For Madge had managed the little waif's affairs most undiplomatically. When she discovered the threat that Philip held over Tania if she told his secret, the little captain went to Mrs. Curtis with the story. She did not wish her friend to be deceived by the young man, so she confided to Mrs. Curtis that Philip Holt, who was supposedly the son of some old friends, was really the child of old Sal of the tenements. Mrs. Curtis thought that Madge must be mistaken. She wrote to old Sal to ask her if it were true. The Irish woman was devoted to her son. She would have done anything in the world not to disgrace him. She answered Mrs. Curtis's letter by declaring that Philip Holt was no relative of hers, but a young man whom she knew because of his kindness to the

poor. Mrs. Curtis was indignant. She insisted that Tania had told Madge a falsehood, and that Philip Holt was right in his opinion of Tania. It would not be well to send the child to a school; she should be put in some kind of an institution. This, however, Madge was determined should never happen. She had no money of her own, nor did she know where she was to obtain the means, but she made up her mind to find some way to provide for her quaint little Fairy Godmother.

The morning after Madge's disquieting talk with Mrs. Curtis the four girls and Tania wandered up the bay to spend the morning in the woods near the water. Phyllis carried a book that she meant to read aloud, Madge a box of luncheon, and Eleanor and Lillian their sewing. Tania skipped along with her hand in Madge's. Tom had promised to join them later in the day if he returned in time from his trip on the water.

The girls settled themselves under some trees whence they could command a view of the land and the bay. Madge lay down in the soft grass and rested her head in her hands. She meant to listen to Phil's reading, not to puzzle over her own worries. Phil's book gave a thrilling account of the early days in the Delaware Bay, when it was the favorite cruising place for pi-

rates. It was rather hard to believe, when the girls gazed out on the smooth, blue water, that it had once been the scene of so many fierce adventures with pirates. Once a crew of seventy men, belonging to the famous Captain Kidd, had actually sailed up the Delaware Bay and frightened the people of Philadelphia.

Madge had forgotten to listen. She could hear Phil's voice, but not her words. The history of piracy, of course, was very thrilling, but Madge did not see how any long-ago dead and buried pirates or their hidden treasures could help her out of her present difficulties. She stood in need of real riches.

A sailboat dipped across the horizon and headed for the landing not far from where the girls were sitting, but no one of them noticed it.

"Look ahoy! look ahoy!" a friendly voice cried out from across the water.

Phyllis closed her book with a snap, Lillian and Eleanor dropped their sewing, Tania ran to the water's edge, and Madge sat up.

It was Captain Jules who had hailed them.

"Well, my hearties, is this a summer camp?" demanded the old sailor as his boat came near the land. "I have been all the way to the houseboat to find you. I have something to show you." Captain Jules's broad face shone with good humor. He was clad in his weather-beaten

tarpaulins, and on his shoulder perched the monkey.

Madge covered the sides of her curly head with her hands. "Please don't let the monkey pull my hair this morning," she pleaded as the captain came up.

He tossed the monkey over to Tania, who cuddled it affectionately in her arms, and began talking softly to it.

Then Captain Jules seated himself on the grass and the houseboat girls gathered about him in a circle. He put one great hand in his pocket. "I've some presents for you," he announced, trying to look very serious, but smiling in spite of himself.

"What are they?" asked Lillian eagerly.

"That's telling," returned the captain. "You must guess."

"Shells," said Tania quickly.

Captain Jules shook his head. "You're warm, little girl," he replied, "but you haven't guessed right yet."

Lillian sighed. "I never could guess anything," she remarked sadly. "Please do tell us what it is."

The captain relented and drew out of his pocket a handful of what seemed to be either oyster or mussel shells.

"You've brought some oysters for our lunch-

eon, haven't you?" guessed Eleanor. "You must stay and eat them with us."

Captain Jules chuckled. "Oysters are out of season, child, and these are never good to eat."

But Madge had clapped her hands together suddenly, her eyes shining. "You have been down to the bottom of the bay, haven't you, Captain Jules? And you've found some pearls!"

Captain Jules shook his head. "I wouldn't call them pearls, exactly. They're too little and too poor. But come, now; maybe they are seed pearls. I went down under the water with the men who were looking over the oyster beds yesterday. Pearl oysters are not found in beds, like the edible oysters, so I wandered around on the bottom of the bay a bit and picked up these." The captain extended his great hand. Five pairs of eager eyes peered into it. There lay four nearly round, thick shells, horny and rough with tiny little pearls embedded in them.

"'Pearls are angel's tears'," quoted Phil softly.

Captain Jules seemed worried. "I searched about everywhere in the bay, but I could only find these four tiny pearls, and pretty lucky I was to find them!" the sailor continued. "They aren't of much value, but I wanted to give them to five girls, and that's just the difficulty." The

captain looked at the houseboat party, which now included Tania, as though he did not know just what he should make up his mind to do.

"Let's draw straws for them," suggested Eleanor sensibly.

Madge shook her head. "No; Captain Jules is to give them to you and to leave me out. Remember, some stranger gave me a handsome pearl when I graduated. I have never had it mounted." Madge slipped her arm confidingly through the old sea captain's and gazed into his face with her most earnest expression. "Captain Jules is going to do something else for me; he is going down to the bottom of the bay again in his diving suit, and he is going to take me with him."

"What a ridiculous idea!" protested Eleanor. "Just as though Captain Jules would think of doing any such thing."

Lillian laughed unbelievingly, but Phil's face was serious. "It would be awfully jolly, wouldn't it? There wouldn't be any danger if Captain Jules should take you. Do please take Madge down with you, and then take me," she insisted coaxingly.

Captain Jules shook his head, but the little captain observed that he did not look half so shocked at the idea as he had the first time she proposed it. This was encouraging.

Phil took hold of one of the captain's hands and Madge the other.

"Please, please, *please!*" they pleaded in chorus.

"Miss Jenny Ann wouldn't let you," objected Captain Jules faintly.

"But if we were to get her permission," argued Madge triumphantly, "then you would take us down to the bottom of the bay. I just knew you would, you are so splendid! I shall send to New York to see if we can rent a diving suit."

"Never mind about that, I'll see about the suit," promised Captain Jules. "But it's all nonsense, and I have never said that I would take you. I wish I weren't a sailor. There is an old saying that a sailor can never refuse anything to a woman."

"Here comes Tom," announced Lillian hurriedly.

"Then don't say anything to him about the diving," warned Madge. "He will think it is perfectly dreadful for girls to attempt it."

CHAPTER XV

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

THE news that old Captain Jules Fontaine, the retired pearl diver, whose history was a mystery to most of the inhabitants at Cape May, was to take Madge Morton down to the bottom of Delaware Bay with him spread through the town and seaside resort like wildfire. It was in vain that the houseboat party and Captain Jules tried to keep the affair a secret. There were necessary arrangements to be made, men to be engaged to assist in the diving operations; it was impossible to deny everything.

At first the plan seemed to outsiders like mere midsummer madness. Then the story began to grow. Cape May residents learned that Captain Jules had found pearls in the bottom of the bay. No one would believe the captain's statement that the pearls were of little value; gossip made the tiny pearls grow larger and larger, until they were fit for an empress.

Captain Jules was besieged at his little house up the bay, although, as usual, he kept the door fastened against intruders. Half the fishermen and oystermen in the vicinity begged to be per-

mitted to accompany the old sea diver in his descent into the water. Captain Jules politely explained that he needed no companions; he was merely going on a diving expedition to amuse two of his friends, Phyllis Alden and Madge Morton, who had a taste for watery adventure. He did not expect to find anything of value in the bottom of the bay. They were going down merely for sport.

There was one person at Cape May who listened eagerly to any tale of the fabulous riches that the old pearl diver was evidently expecting to unearth. He was Philip Holt. The time of his visit at Cape May was rapidly passing. Mrs. Curtis was exceedingly kind and interested in her guest, but Philip did not feel that he dared approach her too abruptly with the request for so large a sum of money as five thousand dollars. Besides, Philip Holt knew that Tom Curtis disliked him heartily. Tom was not likely to approve a man whom Madge mistrusted; nor would Mrs. Curtis give away or lend five thousand dollars without first consulting her son. So the marvelous tale of the pearls to be found in the Delaware Bay rooted itself in Philip Holt's imagination. Here was another way to get out of his scrape. He was not fond of adventure, but he would do anything in the world for money. Perhaps he could find pearls enough

not only to pay his debt, but to make him rich forever afterward.

Quietly, and without a word to any one, Philip Holt made a secret visit to the house of the three sails. He implored Captain Jules to make him his diving companion. He attempted to bribe him with sums of money that he did not possess. He even threatened the old sailor that he would make investigations about his life and expose any secrets that the captain might wish to keep. Captain Jules only laughed at these threats. He was not going down in the bay for treasures, he declared. He expected to find absolutely nothing of any value. Positively he would not allow any one to accompany him but the two girls.

Madge and Phyllis had a hard fight to persuade Miss Jenny Ann to give her consent to their plan for playing mermaid. But she was getting so accustomed to the exciting adventures of her girls that, when Captain Jules assured her there was really no special danger, so long as he kept a close watch on the diver with him, she finally agreed to the scheme. Captain Jules gave the two girls every kind of instruction in the art of diving that he thought necessary, and the day of the great watery adventure was set for the week ahead.

On the morning of Tuesday, July 12th, Madge

awoke at daybreak. She felt a delicious, shivery thrill pass over her that was one part fear and the other part rapture.

"Phil," she whispered a few seconds later, when she heard her chum stirring in the berth above her, "can you feel fins growing where your feet are? Your flop in the bed sounded as though you were a real mermaid! Just think, at ten o'clock sharp we are going down to explore a new world! I wonder if there were ever any girl divers before? You are awfully good to let me go down first."

"No, I am not," answered Phil soberly. "If there is any danger, I am letting you go down to it first. But I shall watch above the water, with all my eyes, to see that everything goes right. The captain has explained the whole business of diving to us so thoroughly that I believe I can tell if anything is wrong with you below the surface. You'll be careful, won't you, Madge? You know you are usually rather reckless. Don't stay down too long."

"Oh, Captain Jules won't let me be reckless this time. We are not going down into very deep water, anyway, and a professional diver can stay under several hours when the water is only about five fathoms deep."

Madge and Phyllis ate a very light breakfast. Captain Jules had told them that a diver must

never go down into the water on a full stomach, as it would make him too short-winded. While the two prospective divers were eating poor Miss Jenny Ann was wondering what had ever induced her to give her consent to so mad an enterprise as this diving.

Every effort had been made to keep a crowd away from the pier from which Captain Jules meant to send out the boats with the tenders, who were the men to look after the safety of Madge and himself.

As the girls came up, with Miss Jenny Ann, to join Captain Jules they saw twenty or thirty people about. Mrs. Curtis and Tom, accompanied by Philip Holt, had come down to the pier. Mrs. Curtis would hardly speak to Madge, she was so angry at the risk she believed the little captain was running. She and Madge had not been very friendly since they had disagreed so utterly in Madge's report of the real character and name of Philip Holt.

Madge and Phyllis each wore a close fitting, warm woolen dress. Madge had tucked up her red-brown curls into a tight knot. Her eyes were glowing, but her face was white and her lips a little less red when Captain Jules came forward to fasten her into her diving suit.

"Don't attempt it, Madge, if you are frightened," urged Miss Jenny Ann, who was feel-

ing dreadfully frightened herself. "I am sure Captain Jules will forgive you if you back out."

Captain Jules looked at Madge searchingly. Her eyes smiled bravely into his, although her heart was going pit-a-pat.

"Miss Madge is not afraid," answered Captain Jules curtly. "Robert Morton's daughter has no right to know fear."

Madge first slipped her feet into a pair of heavy leather boots. She gave a gay laugh as she slipped into her rubber cloth suit, which was made in one piece. "I feel just like a walrus," she confided to Tom Curtis, who was watching her with set lips.

Then Madge and Captain Jules, who was in exactly the same costume, got into their boats and moved out a little distance from the shore.

Tom Curtis had asked Captain Jules's consent to sit in one of the boats with Phil. At the last moment Philip Holt stepped calmly into the other. No one stopped to argue with him, or to thrust him out; the whole party was too much excited.

Not for all the pearls in all the seas would Captain Jules Fontaine have allowed one hair of Madge's head to be injured. But he really did not believe that she would be in any danger under the water with him. He had arranged every detail of the diving perfectly. He would

watch her every movement at the bottom of the bay. To tell the truth, Captain Jules was immensely proud of Madge's and Phil's bravery in desiring to accompany him.

The final moment for the dive arrived. Madge waved her hand to the crowd of her friends lining the shore. She flung back her head and looked gayly, triumphantly, up at the blue sky above her, with its sweep of white, sailing clouds. Below her the water looked even more deeply blue.

"Remember, Madge," whispered Captain Jules calmly, "the one quality a diver needs more than anything else is presence of mind. Keep a clear head under the water and nothing shall harm you, I swear. But above all, don't forget your signals."

With his own hands Captain Jules fastened the brass corselet about Madge's slender neck and set a big copper helmet which he screwed over her head to her corselet. Madge then surveyed the world only through the glass windows at each side of her head and in front. Her air-tube entered her helmet at the back. Two men in one of the boats were to keep the young girl diver supplied with oxygen by pumping fresh air down through this tube.

A moment later Captain Jules stood rigged in the same costume as Madge.

"Steady, my girl," Captain Jules warned her.

"Aye, aye, Captain," returned Madge quietly, "I'm ready. Let us go down together to the bottom of the bay."

"Pump away," ordered the captain.

There was a splash on the surface of the clear water, a long-drawn gasp from Madge's friends; then a few bubbles rose. Rapidly, skillfully, Madge's tenders played out her life and pipe lines, and Madge Morton disappeared from the world of men. Captain Jules made his plunge a few seconds in advance of his companion.

In the boat where Tom Curtis and Phyllis Alden sat there was a breathless, intense silence. The boy and girl happened to be in the boat with the men who were looking out for the welfare of Captain Jules. Philip Holt was with Madge's tenders.

Phyllis knew that there was but one way in which she could follow her chum's course below the surface of the water. She could watch her life and air lines. Captain Jules had made it plain to Phyllis that all the time the diver is under water small ripples will appear near his air line. These bubbles are caused by the air that the diver breathes out from the valve in the side of his diving helmet.

Phyllis watched the lines doggedly. Captain Jules was to keep Madge under water only about fifteen or twenty minutes, but at that a minute may appear longer than an hour.

Suddenly Phyllis Alden discovered that the man who was tending Madge's air pump seemed to be working less vigorously. He pumped unevenly. Once he swayed, as though he were about to fall over in his seat.

In a second it flashed over Phyllis that the man was ill. He was a strong, red-faced individual, but his face turned to a kind of ghastly pallor. It was all so quick that Phil had no time to speak from her boat. Philip Holt, who was in the same boat with the man, grasped the situation as quickly as Phyllis did. With a single motion he took the tender's place at the air-pump. Phil saw that he was pumping away with vigor.

At this moment Phil turned to speak to Tom Curtis. "Tom, how long have they been under the water?" she whispered.

"Ten minutes," returned Tom, glancing hastily at his watch.

"It seems ten hours," murmured Phil, as though she dared not speak aloud.

Tug, tug! Phil thought she saw Madge's air line give two desperate jerks. Two pulls at the line was the diver's signal for more air. Phil

knew that without a doubt. Yet Philip Holt seemed to be pumping vigorously. At least, he had been only the second before when Phil last looked at him.

Again Phil saw Madge's air line jerk twice.

Tom Curtis and the two men in Captain Jules's boat were vainly trying to interpret some signals that Captain Jules was making to them. The two boats were at no great distance apart.

"I am afraid something is the matter below, Phil," Tom Curtis turned to mutter hoarsely. But Phyllis Alden, who had been sitting near him a moment before, was no longer there.

Phyllis believed she saw that Philip Holt was only pretending to pump sufficient air down to Madge. She may have been wrong. Who could ever tell? But Phil knew there was no time to discuss the matter. One minute, two minutes, five or ten—Phil did not know how long a diver at the bottom of the water can be shut off from his supply of fresh air and live. She did not mean to wait, to ask questions, or to lose time. Phil made a flying leap from the skiff that held her to the one in which Philip Holt sat by the air-pump. She landed in the water, just alongside the boat. Quietly, though more quickly than she had ever moved before in her life, Phil climbed into the boat and thrust Philip Holt

away from the air pump. In the minute it had taken her to make her plunge she had seen Madge's signal again, but this time the line jerked more feebly than it had before.

Phil set the pump to working again; the signal answered from below, "All is well!"

The tender had recovered from his attack of faintness and resumed his work at Madge's airline.

But Philip Holt sat crouched in the bottom of the boat, his face white with anger. What would Phyllis Alden's action suggest but that he was trying to suffocate Madge in the water below?

Whether or not Philip Holt meant to stifle Madge Morton he himself never really knew. The impulse came to him as he placed his hands on her air-pump. It flashed across his mind that it was Madge who had tried to injure his prospects with Mrs. Curtis, and who had kept him from going down with Captain Jules to search for the pearls that he firmly believed would be found at the bottom of the bay. It was while these thoughts passed through Philip Holt's mind his pressure on Madge's air-pump had wavered. But Phyllis Alden had discovered it. She gave him no opportunity either for action or regret.

CHAPTER XVI

A STRANGE PEARL

MADGE felt herself in a great fairy world peopled with giants. Every thing below the water is magnified a thousandfold. Slowly she went down and down! The fishes splashed and tumbled about her, hurrying to get away from this strange, new sea-monster that had come into their midst.

The little captain felt no mental sensation except one of wonder and of awe; no physical impression save a pressure as of a great weight on her head and a roaring of mighty waters in her ears. She no longer had any idea of being afraid.

At the first plunge into the water she had shut her eyes, but now, as she approached the bottom of the bay, she kept them wide open.

The water was clear as crystal, like the reflection in a mammoth mirror. She could see nearly fifty feet ahead of her. Captain Jules walked just in front of her, swinging his great body from side to side, peering down into the sandy bottom of the bay. Madge discovered that the only way in which she could get a view, except the one directly in front of her, was by

turning her head inside her helmet, to look through her side window glasses. The goggles over her eyes gave her just the view that a horse has with blinkers.

There were hundreds of things that Madge would have liked to confide to Captain Jules. However, for once in her life, she was compelled to hold her tongue. Her eyes, her hands, and her feet she could keep busy. Now and then she gave a little ejaculation of wonder inside her copper helmet at the marvels she saw. No one heard her cry out. Captain Jules wasted no time. He was exceedingly business-like. He motioned to Madge just where she should go and what she should do, and she obediently followed.

There were long, level flats of sand in the bottom of Delaware Bay, like small prairies. Then there were exquisite oases of waving green seaweed, gardens of sea flowers and ferns, and hillocks of rocks, with all sorts of queer sea animals, crabs, jelly-fish, and devil-fish, scurrying about them.

Caught in the moss, encrusted on the rocks, sunken in the yellow sands, were opalescent, shining shells and pebbles, each one more beautiful than the last. Madge did not realize that if she carried these shells and pebbles above the water they would look like ordinary stones.

Every now and then the young diver would stoop and drop one of them in her netted bag with a thrill of excitement.

Again and again Captain Jules had assured Madge that she must not expect to find any pearls of much value in Delaware Bay. There were few pearls in edible oysters. The beds about Cape May were meant to supply the family table, not the family jewels. Of course, it was true, the Captain admitted, that a pearl did appear now and then in an ordinary oyster. Yet this was an accident and most unlikely to occur.

Madge had really tried not to believe that she was going to find any kind of prize in the new world under the water. In spite of all her efforts she had been thinking and planning and hoping. Perhaps—perhaps she would find a pearl of great price. Then her troubles would be at an end.

All this time Madge had been breathing naturally and comfortably inside her helmet as she traveled along the bed of the bay. She was so unconscious of any difficulty that she was beginning to believe that she was, in truth, a mermaid, and that water, and not air, was her natural element. Suddenly she felt a little uneasy, as though the windows of her room had been closed for too long a time. It was nothing, she

was sure. The stifling sensation would pass in another second.

At this moment Captain Jules gazed hard at Madge. He had never forgotten his charge for a moment. But all seemed well with her, and the captain thought he saw ahead of him something that was well worth investigating. He dropped on his knees in the soft mud. With him he had a small hammer and a fork, not unlike a gardener's. Shining through some green sea moss so soft and fine that it might have been the hair of a water-baby, Captain Jules had espied some glittering shells. To his experienced eye the glow was that of mother-of-pearl. It is the mother-of-pearl shell that usually covers the precious pearl. The old sailor set to work. Madge was eagerly watching him, when once again the faint stifling sensation swept over her. Surely it was not possible to faint in a diving suit. Besides, Madge's heart was beating so furiously with excitement that it was small wonder she could not get her breath. She believed that Captain Jules was about to discover a wonderful pearl. He had wrenched the shells free and was trying to open them. Madge stood some feet away from him, quivering with excitement.

"'And the sea shall give up its treasures'," she quoted softly to herself as she watched.

The next moment her hands made an involuntary movement in the water. Had she been on land her gesture would have meant that she was fighting for breath. To her horror she realized that she was slowly suffocating. Something must have happened to her air-pump above the water. She was not faint from any other cause, but was getting an insufficient supply of fresh air.

At this moment Madge proved her mettle. She remembered Captain Jules's injunction, "Keep a clear head under the water and there is nothing to fear." She knew the signal for more fresh air, and gave two hard, quick pulls on her life line. Then she waited. Relief would surely come in a moment.

For the first and only time since their descent to the bottom of the bay Captain Jules had temporarily neglected Madge. He certainly had not expected to find any pearls in so unlikely a place as Delaware Bay; yet the shells he held in his hand were most unusual. The thrill of his old occupation seized hold of the pearl fisher. His big hands fairly trembled with emotion. He felt, rather than saw, Madge jerk her life line twice, but it never dawned on him that her signal for more air might fail to be answered.

Madge signaled again. A loud buzzing seemed to sound in her ears. Her tongue felt

thick and swollen. She could not see a foot ahead of her. All the dazzling, shimmering beauty of the world under the water had passed into blackness. The little captain's eyes were glazing behind the glass windows of her helmet. She felt that she must be dying. But she had strength to give one more signal. Air! air! How could she ever have believed that there was anything in the world so precious as fresh air? Madge had a vision of a field of new-mown hay in her old home at "Forest House." The wind was blowing through it with a delicious fragrance. Had she the strength to pull her life line once again? The water that she loved so dearly was to claim her at last. She made a motion to go toward Captain Jules, but she had no control of her limbs.

Then Captain Jules became aroused to action. He realized that Madge had signaled for air, not once, but several times. This meant that her signal had not been answered. The captain had been for too many years a deep-sea diver not to guess instantly the girl's condition. The groan inside his helmet came from the bottom of his heart. Captain Jules's hands shook. He dropped the shells that he believed might contain priceless pearls down into the soft sand in the bed of the bay.

It was at this moment that Tom Curtis and

Phyllis Alden, as well as the captain's boat tenders, caught his confusing signals from below. More fresh air was pumped down the tube to Captain Jules, but not to Madge.

Phil's leap and quick work at Madge's air-pump must have taken place not more than three minutes afterward, but they were horrible, agonizing moments. Madge hardly knew how they passed. Captain Jules suffered the regret of a lifetime. How could he have been so unwise as to entrust the safety of this girl, whose life was so dear to him, to the perils of a diver's experiences? In the few weeks of their acquaintance Madge Morton had become all in all to Captain Jules Fontaine.

There was but one thing for Captain Jules to do for his companion. He must signal to have her drawn up to the surface of the water again, trusting that she would not suffocate for lack of air in her ascent.

Madge was near enough to lay her hand on Captain Jules's arm. Phil's relief had come just in time. The life-giving fresh air from the world above pressed into her copper helmet. It filled her nose and mouth, it poured into her aching lungs. She received new life, new energy. Now she was no longer afraid. She did not wish to go above the surface of the water. Surely all above was now well. She

yearned to continue her adventures on the under side of the world.

She it was, not Captain Jules, who dropped down on her hands and knees to grope for the captain's lost pearl shells.

But the sand had covered them up forever, or else the water had carried them away!

Captain Jules wished to take Madge out of the water immediately, yet he yielded for a minute to her disappointment. What treasures had they lost when he threw the mother-of-pearl shells away? Neither of them would ever know. The old diver looked about in the soft mud, while Madge raked furiously near the spot where she thought the sailor had dropped the shells. Captain Jules walked on for a little distance. He had seen beyond them a tangled mass of other shells and seaweed and it occurred to him that the water might have carried his shells into some hidden crevice nearby.

But Madge never left her chosen spot. Deeper and deeper she dug. What a swirl of mud arose and eddied about her, darkening the clear water in which she stood! The little captain's hammer struck against something hard. Was it a rock embedded in the sand? Yet a distinct sound rang out, as of one metal striking against another!

Madge did not know how she summoned Cap-

tain Jules back to her side. She was wild with curiosity and excitement. Captain Jules was smiling behind his copper mask. The young girl diver had probably found a piece of old iron cast off from some ship. Still, she should unearth whatever she had discovered so near the dark kingdom of Pluto.

The captain worked with her. Whatever her find might be, it was larger and heavier than Captain Jules had expected. They could afford to spend no more time with it. It was time for Madge to leave the water.

It is difficult to make an imploring gesture in a diver's suit. Yet, somehow, Madge must have managed to do so. For one moment longer the old pearl diver relented. The hole that they were digging in the bottom of the bay was widening before them. A chunk of what looked like solid iron was visible. Then a triangular end came into view. It was rusted until it shone like beautiful green enamel. The top was absolutely flat and of some depth, as it was so hard to excavate.

The time was growing short. Madge had been under the water as long as was safe for any amateur diver. The captain was a man to be obeyed, as she knew instinctively. She gave one more dig into the mud about her iron treasure. It now became plain, both to her and to Captain

Jules, that she had found an old iron chest. The captain tugged at it with both his great, strong hands. It was strangely heavy. But he managed to lift it in his arms.

Straightway he gave the signal to ascend; three sharp tugs at his life line. Madge followed suit. But she cast one long backward glance at the watery world into which she might never again descend, as slowly, steadily, the boat tenders pulled up her long life line. Her feet dangled above the sandy bottom of the bay. Now she could see even farther off. About forty feet from the rapidly filling hole from which she and the captain had extracted the iron chest was a spar of a ship jutting above the sand. The little captain may have been wrong, but it looked like the very spar on which Tania's dress had caught the day she was so nearly drowned. Madge could not tell how far she and Captain Jules had traveled on the bottom of the bay, but she knew they had made their descent at a place no very great distance from the spot where Roy Dennis's yacht had run down their skiff, and Captain Jules had rescued Tania and herself.

Thought travels swifter than anything else in the created world. So Madge's thoughts had reached the upper world before she followed them. She wondered if the girls would be very sadly disappointed when she returned bearing,

instead of a costly pearl, nothing but a rusted iron box!

Would Phil have better luck when she descended to the depths of the bay? What had happened in the outside world since she had disappeared from it a long, long time ago?

A flare of blinding sunlight smote across the glass goggles in Madge's copper helmet. She felt herself picked up and lifted bodily into a boat. Her helmet and corselet were unscrewed. She lay still, smiling faintly as the boat made for her friends who crowded, watching, on the pier. Captain Jules, bearing the small iron chest, landed a moment later. The little captain had been in a new world, into which few men and rarely any women have ever entered. She had been out of her human element, a creature of the water, not of the air, and it seemed to her that she must have lived a whole new lifetime as a deep-sea diver.

Tom Curtis stared anxiously at his watch and smiled into her white face. He breathed a sigh of relief and of wonder. Captain Jules Fontaine and Madge Morton had been down at the bottom of Delaware Bay exactly thirty minutes!

CHAPTER XVII

THE FAIRY GODMOTHER'S WISH COMES TRUE

CAPTAIN JULES decided to wait until another day before taking Phyllis Alden on the journey from which he and Madge had just returned. The old sailor was too deeply thankful to see his first charge safe on land. Poor Miss Jenny Ann could do nothing but lean over Madge and cry; the nervous strain of waiting while the girl was under the water had been too great. Indeed, even the people who, Madge knew, were not in the least interested in her, appeared dreadfully upset. Philip Holt's face was very pale and his eyes shifted uneasily from Phyllis's to Madge's face.

Phyllis was the most self-possessed of the four girls. She was greatly disappointed at the captain's determination to put off the time for her diving expedition until a later date. But Phyllis was always unselfish. She realized that her chaperon and her friends had had about as much anxiety as they could endure in one day. Madge had been under the water, and she could not dream of what the others had suffered above, while awaiting her return.

Mrs. Curtis put her arms about the little captain and embraced her with an affection she had not shown her during the summer.

"My dear," she murmured, "will you ever stop being the most reckless girl in the world? What possible good could that wretched diving feat of yours do anybody on earth? If my hair weren't already white I am sure it would have turned so in the last half-hour. Look at poor Philip Holt. He seems as nervous as though you were his own sister."

Madge and Captain Jules had both taken off their heavy diving suits and were soon shaking hands with every one on the pier. Even Roy Dennis and Mabel Farrar, much as they disliked Madge, could not conceal the fact that they thought her extremely plucky.

Captain Jules had laid the iron chest on the ground and for the moment they had forgotten it.

It was little Tania who danced up to it and tried to lift it.

"Show us the pearls you found, Madge," Eleanor begged her cousin at this instant, her brown eyes twinkling.

The little captain looked crestfallen. "I am afraid we didn't find anything of value," she said, trying to pretend that she was not disappointed. "I have only some pretty shells and

stones that I gathered on the bottom of the bay for Tania."

She pulled her sea treasures out of her netted diving bag. Sure enough, the water had dried on them and the shells and stones appeared quite dull and ugly. There were almost as pretty shells and pebbles to be picked up at any place along the Cape May beach.

"Why, Madge!" exclaimed Lillian, before she realized what she was saying, "surely, you didn't waste your time in bringing up such silly trifles as these?"

Madge shook her head humbly. "We didn't find anything else but this old iron chest. Captain Jules, may I take it back to the houseboat with me as a souvenir, or do you wish it? Tania, child, you can't lift it, it is too heavy."

Tom Curtis brought the chest to Captain Jules. Some of the crowd had moved away, now that the diving was over. But a dozen or more strangers pressed about the girls and their friends.

"There is something in this little chest, Captain," declared Tom Curtis quietly, as he set it down before the captain and Madge. "I could feel something roll around in the box as I lifted it."

Captain Jules shook the heavy safe. Something certainly rattled on the inside.

There were bits of moss and tiny shells and stones encrusted on the upper lid of the box. Deliberately Captain Jules scraped them off with a stick. The houseboat party and Tom were beginning to grow impatient. What made Captain Jules so slow? Philip Holt, who was standing by Mrs. Curtis's side, gazed sneeringly at the operations. He was glad, indeed, that he had not risked his life in descending to the bottom of the bay in search for pearls, only to bring up a rusty chest.

"The box is fastened tightly; it will have to be broken open," remarked Madge indifferently. She was feeling tired, now that the excitement of her diving trip was over. She wished to go home to the houseboat. She did not wish Captain Jules to guess for an instant how disappointed she was that they had found nothing of value on their diving adventure. If only the captain had not dropped the shells in which there might have been a chance of finding pearls!

Captain Jules had hold of the iron hammer that he used when diving. Click! click! click! he struck three times on the lock of the iron safe. Like the magic tinder-box, the lid flew open. Tania's long-drawn childish, "Oh!" was the only sound that broke the tense and breathless stillness that pervaded the group.

A single pearl! The scorned iron chest was almost full of shining coins and precious stones! There were coins of gold and silver—strange coins that no one in the watching crowd had ever seen before. Some of them bore dates and inscriptions of English mintings of the early part of the eighteenth century.

Of course, it was incredible! No one believed his eyes. A treasure-chest unearthed after more than two hundred years? It was impossible!

Yet instantly each one of the girls remembered that the pirates had sunk many vessels in Delaware Bay in the latter part of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. In those days many wealthy English families came over with their servants and their treasure to settle in the new country of America.

Phil's book on the history of piracy had recalled this information to the girls only ten days before. It was then, when Madge lay with her head resting in her hands, looking dreamily out over the waters, that she had wondered how anything so remote from her as the story of the early American battles with pirate ships could help her to solve her present troubles? Yet here, like a miracle before her eyes, lay the answer!

The little captain was the last of the onlookers

to know what had happened. She was too dazed, perhaps, from her stay under the water.

It was only when Tania flung her eager, thin arms about her beloved Fairy Godmother's neck that Madge actually woke up.

"The fairies who live under the water have given you these wonderful things," whispered Tania. "I prayed that they would come to see you, bringing you all the good gifts that they had."

Captain Jules reached over and set the priceless box before Madge. She was encircled by Miss Jenny Ann and her beloved houseboat chums.

"It is all yours, Madge," asserted Captain Jules solemnly. "You found it, child. I should never have discovered it but for you."

Madge shook her red-brown head. "Captain Jules, that chest is far more yours than it is mine. I should never have gone down under the water but for you. If Phil had only dived first, instead of me, she would have found it. I won't have any of the money or the jewelry unless I can share it with the rest of you."

Then, to Madge's own surprise, she began to cry.

"There, there, little mate, it will be all right," Captain Jules assured her quietly. "You've had a bit too much for one day. We don't know

the value of what we have found just yet, but the old jewelry will make pretty trinkets for you girls. We'll see about the rest later on."

Miss Jenny Ann put her arm about Madge on one side. Phil was on the other side of her chum.

"We will go home now, dear," said Miss Jenny Ann to Madge. "You are worn out from all this excitement."

"I'll look after the girls, Captain," promised Tom Curtis quietly, "then I will come back to you." A flash of understanding passed between Captain Jules and Tom Curtis. They had both guessed that Madge's iron box of old jewelry and coins represented more money than the girls could comprehend, and that it was better for the news of the discovery to be kept as quiet as possible for the time being.

"You will walk home with me, won't you, Philip?" Mrs. Curtis asked her guest. "I am rather tired from the excitement of this most unusual morning."

But Philip Holt had forgotten that he wished to keep on the good side of his wealthy hostess. His eyes were staring eagerly and greedily at the closed iron box which old Captain Jules was guarding. He took a step forward, stopped and looked at the little crowd standing near.

"No; I can't go back with you now, Mrs.

Curtis," he answered abruptly, "I have some important business to transact."

Mrs. Curtis walked away deeply offended. Philip Holt, however, was too fully occupied with his own disappointment to note this. A sudden daring idea had taken possession of him. Perhaps Madge Morton was not so lucky after all. Finding a treasure did not necessarily mean keeping it.

CHAPTER XVIII

MISSING, A FAIRY GODMOTHER

SEVERAL days after the finding of the treasure-chest experts came down from Philadelphia to appraise its value. It was not easy to decide, immediately, what market price the old jewels, set in quaintly chased gold, would bring. But the least that the coins and stones would be worth was ten thousand dollars! It might be more. An extra thousand dollars or so was hardly worth considering, when ten thousand would make things turn out so beautifully even.

Madge and Captain Jules, Miss Jenny Ann and the other houseboat girls had many discussions about Madge's discovery of the iron safe.

The little captain was entirely alone on one side of the argument. The others were all against her. Yet she won her point. She continued to insist that her wonderful find was purely an accident. How could she ever have unearthed a box, lost from a sunken ship, that had probably been buried for centuries, if Captain Jules Fontaine had not listened to her pleadings and taken her on the wonderful diving trip with him? Though she had actually

struck the first blow on the piece of iron embedded in the bay, she could never have dragged the safe out of the mud, or been able to carry it up to the surface, without Captain Jules's assistance.

Madge and the old sailor started their discussion alone. The captain had come over to the houseboat, bringing the iron safe with him so that the girls might have a better view of its wonders. He had firmly made up his mind that Madge must be made to understand that the money the treasure would bring was to be all hers. He would not accept one cent of it. Fate had been kinder to him than he had hoped in allowing him to guide Madge to the discovery of her fortune.

"Ten thousand dollars!" exclaimed Madge ecstatically, when the old sailor reported the news to her. "It's the most wonderful thing I ever heard of in my life. I didn't dream it was worth so much money. Will you please lend me a piece of paper and a pencil, Captain Jules. I never have been clever at arithmetic." Madge knitted her brows thoughtfully. "Ten thousand dollars divided by two means five thousand dollars for you and the same sum for us."

The captain cleared his throat. "What's the rest of the arithmetic?" he demanded gruffly. "I don't think much of that first division."

But Madge was hardly listening. She was biting the end of her pencil. "Six doesn't go into five thousand just evenly," she replied thoughtfully, "but with fractions I suppose we can manage. You see that will be eight hundred and thirty-three dollars and something over for Miss Jenny Ann to put in bank to take care of her if she ever gets sick, or has to stop teaching; and the same sum will pay for Phil's first year at college and for Eleanor's graduating at Miss Tolliver's, so uncle won't have to worry over that any more. Then my little Fairy Godmother can go to some beautiful school in the country, and not be shut up in a horrid home with a capital 'H,' which is what Philip Holt has persuaded Mrs. Curtis ought to be done with her. And Lillian can save her money to buy pretty clothes, because she is not as poor as the rest of us and dearly loves nice things, and——" Madge's speech ended from lack of breath.

The captain rubbed his rough chin reflectively. "Oh! I see," he nodded, "I am to get half of the money and you are to get a sixth of a half. Is that it?"

Madge lowered her voice to a whisper. "Dear Captain Jules," she said in a wheedling tone, "you'll help me, won't you? The girls and Miss Jenny Ann declare positively that they won't accept a single dollar of the money. I shall be the

Madge and Captain Jules Started Their Discussion Alone.

most miserable girl in the world if they don't. Why, we four girls and Miss Jenny Ann have shared everything in common, our misfortunes and our good fortunes, since we started out together. If any one of the other girls had happened to discover the treasure instead of me, she would certainly have divided it with the others. Phil, Lillian, Eleanor and Miss Jenny Ann don't even dare to deny it. So they simply must give in to me about it."

"Well," continued the captain, "I am yet to be told what Madge Morton means to do with the one-sixth of one-half of her wealth when it finally gets round to her."

The little captain's eyes shone, though her face sobered. "I am not going to college with Phil, though I hate to be parted from her," she replied. "Somehow, I think I am not exactly meant for a college girl. I believe I will just advertise in all the papers in the world for my father. Then, if he is alive, I shall surely find him. With whatever money is left I shall go to him. If he is poor, I will manage to take care of him in some way," ended Madge confidently.

"You will, eh?" returned Captain Jules gruffly. "It seems to me, my girl, that this is a pretty position you have mapped out for me. I am to take half of our find—nice, selfish old codger that I am—while you divide yours with

your friends. I am not going to take a cent of that money, so you can just do your sums over again."

It was at this point that Madge called Miss Jenny Ann and the other houseboat girls into the discussion. It ended with the captain's agreeing to take one-seventh of the money, if all the others would follow suit.

"Because, if you don't," declared Madge in her usual impetuous fashion, "I shall just throw this chest of money and jewelry right overboard and it can go down to the bottom of the bay and stay there, for all I care."

Captain Jules remained to dinner on the houseboat that evening. After dinner the girls proceeded to adorn themselves with the old sets of jewelry found in the safe. Madge wore the pearls because, she insisted, they were her special jewels, and she had gone down to the bottom of the bay to find them. Phil was more fascinated with some old-fashioned garnets, Lillian with a big, golden topaz pin, and Eleanor with some turquoises that had turned a curious greenish color from old age.

It was well after ten o'clock when the captain announced that he must set out for home. Tom Curtis had been spending the evening on the houseboat with the girls, but he had gone home an hour before to join his mother and her guest,

Philip Holt. Before going away the captain concluded that it would be best for him to leave the iron safe of coins and precious stones on the houseboat for the night. It was too late for him to carry it back to "The Anchorage" alone. As no one but Tom knew of its being on the houseboat, the valuables could be in no possible danger. The captain would call some time within the next day or so to take the iron box to a safety deposit vault in the town of Cape May.

Together Miss Jenny Ann and the captain hid the precious chest in a small drawer in the sideboard built into the wall of the little dining room cabin of the houseboat. They locked this drawer carefully and Miss Jenny Ann hid the key under her pillow without speaking of it to any one.

In spite of these precautions no one on the houseboat dreamed of any possible danger to the safety of their newly-found prize. Remember, no one knew of its being on the houseboat save Tom Curtis and Captain Jules. Up to tonight Captain Jules had been guarding the treasure at his house up the bay. No one had been allowed to see it since the famous day of its discovery, except the experts who had come down from Philadelphia to give some idea of the value of Madge's remarkable find.

Little Tania was in the habit of sleeping in the dining room of the houseboat on a cot which

Miss Jenny Ann prepared for her each night. She went to bed earlier than the other girls, so, in order not to disturb her, she was stowed away in there instead of occupying one of the berths in the two staterooms. Soon after the captain's departure Miss Jenny Ann tucked Tania safely in bed. She closed the door of the dining room that led out on the cabin deck and also the door that connected with the stateroom occupied by Madge and Phil. The cabin of the "Merry Maid" was a square divided into four rooms, and Miss Jenny Ann's bedroom did not open directly into the dining room.

It was a dark night and a strangely still one. The weather was unusually warm and close for Cape May. Over the flat marshes and islands the heat was oppressive. The residents of the summer cottages left their doors and windows open, hoping that a stray breeze might spring up during the night to refresh them. No one seemed to have any fear of burglars.

On the "Merry Maid" the night was so still and cloudy that the girls sat up for an hour after Captain Jules left them, talking over their wonderful good fortune. They were almost asleep before they tumbled into their berths. Once there, they slept soundly all night long. Nothing apparently happened to disturb them, but Madge, who was the lightest sleeper in the

party, did half-waken at one time during the night. She thought she heard Tania cry out. It was a peculiar cry and was not repeated. She knew that Tania was given to dreaming. Almost every night the child made some kind of sound in her sleep. Madge sat up in bed and listened, but hearing no further sound, she went fast asleep again without a thought of anxiety.

Miss Jenny Ann was the first to open her eyes the next morning. It must have been as late as seven o'clock, for the sun was shining brilliantly. She slipped on her wrapper and went into the kitchen to start the fire. A few moments later she went into the dining room to call Tania and to help the child to dress. But the dining room door on to the cabin deck was open. Tania's bedclothes were in a heap on the floor. The child had disappeared.

Miss Jenny Ann was not in the least uneasy or annoyed. She knew that Tania had a way of creeping in Madge's bed in the early mornings and of snuggling close to her. Miss Jenny Ann tip-toed softly into Madge's and Phil's stateroom. There was no dark head with its straight, short black hair and quaint, elfish face pressed close against Madge's lovely auburn one. Madge was slumbering peacefully. Miss Jenny Ann peered into the upper berth. Phil was alone and had not stirred.

Tania was such a queer, wild little thing! Miss Jenny Ann felt annoyed. Perhaps Tania had awakened and slipped off the boat without telling any of them. She had solemnly promised never to run away again, but she might have broken her word. Miss Jenny Ann explored the houseboat decks. She called the child's name softly once or twice so as not to disturb the other girls. There was no answer. She went back into the cabin dining room. Neatly folded on the chair, where Miss Jenny Ann herself had placed them the night before, were Tania's clothes. The child could hardly have run away in her little white nightgown.

When the girls finally wakened Madge was the only one of them who was alarmed at first. She recalled Tania's strange cry in the night. She wondered if it could have been possible that she had heard a sound before the little girl cried out. But she could not decide. She would not believe, however, that Tania had forgotten her promise and gone away again without permission.

As soon as Eleanor and Lillian were dressed they went ashore and walked up and down near the houseboat, calling aloud for Tania. Phyllis was the most composed of the party. She had two small twin sisters of her own and knew that children were in the habit of creating just such

unnecessary excitements. Still, it was better to look for a lost child before she had had time to wander too far away.

"Madge," suggested Phil quietly, "don't be so frightened about Tania. I have an idea the child has walked off the houseboat in her sleep. She must have done so, for the dining room door is unlocked from the inside. Our door on to the deck was not locked, but Tania's was, because Miss Jenny Ann recalls having locked it herself. She came through our room when she joined us outdoors after putting Tania to bed. You and I had better go up at once to find Tom Curtis. Dear old Tom is such a comfort! He will help us search for Tania. Then, if it is necessary, he will ask the Cape May authorities to have the police on the lookout for her. If Tania has wandered off in her sleep, the poor little thing will be terrified when she wakes up and finds herself in a strange place. Surely, some one will take her in and care for her until we find her."

Madge and Phil were wonderfully glad to find Tom Curtis up and alone on his front veranda. He had just come in from a swim. He seemed so strong, clean, and fine after his morning's dip in the ocean that his two girl friends were immediately reassured. Tom would tell them just what had better be done to find Tania.

"Mrs. Curtis's and Philip Holt's window

blinds are still down, thank goodness!" whispered Madge to Phil, "so I suppose they are both asleep. Let us not tell them anything about Tania's disappearance. They would just put it down to naughtiness in her, and that would make me awfully cross."

Tom Curtis felt perfectly sure that he would soon run across the lost Tania. So he left word for his mother that he had gone to the houseboat and that she was not to expect him until she saw him again.

For two hours Tom and the houseboat party continued the hunt for the lost child without calling in assistance. Then Madge and Tom went to the town authorities of Cape May. The police investigated the city and the houses in the nearby seaside resort without finding the least clue to Tania. Toward the close of the long day Tom Curtis began to fear that Tania had fallen into the water. Cape May is only a strip of land between the great ocean and the bay, and the land is broken into many small islands nearly surrounded by salt water and marshes.

Tom managed to get the girls safely out of the way; then, with Miss Jenny Ann's permission, he had the water near the houseboat thoroughly dredged. But Tania's little body was not found for the second time down in the bottom of the bay. It was not possible to have all

the water in the neighborhood dragged in a single day, so Tom said nothing of his fears to his anxious friends.

It was late in the evening. Miss Jenny Ann had prepared dinner for the weary and disheartened girls. She had snowy biscuit, broiled ham, roasted potatoes, milk, and honey, the very things her charges usually loved. Tom Curtis felt impelled to go back home. All that day he had seen nothing of his mother or of their visitor, Philip Holt, and Tom was afraid they would begin to wonder what had become of him.

Madge caught Tom by the sleeve and looked at him with beseeching eyes. "Please don't go, Tom," she begged, with a catch in her voice, "I am sure your mother won't mind. She has Mr. Holt with her, and I can't bear to see you go."

Tom and Madge were near the gangplank of the houseboat and Tom was trying to make up his mind what he should do, when he and Madge caught sight of a gray-clad figure walking toward them through the twilight mists.

"It's Mother," explained Tom in a relieved tone. "Now I can make it all right with her."

"And that horrid Philip Holt isn't along," declared Madge delightedly, "so I can tell her about poor little Tania."

Mrs. Curtis caught Madge, who had run out

to meet her, by the hand. "My dear child, what is the matter with you?" the older woman asked immediately. "Even in this half-light I can see that your face is pale as death and you look utterly worn out. If one of you is ill, why have you not sent for me?"

When Madge faltered out her story of the lost Tania Mrs. Curtis hugged her to her in the old sympathetic way that the little captain knew and loved.

"I am so sorry, dear," soothed Mrs. Curtis, "but I am sure than Tom and Philip Holt will find her. I suppose that is why they have both been away all day."

"Philip Holt!" exclaimed Tom in surprise. "He hasn't been with us. I thought he was at home with you."

Mrs. Curtis shook her head indifferently. "No; he hasn't been at the cottage all day. Have any of you thought to send word to Captain Jules to ask him about Tania? It may be that the child is with him. In any event, I know Captain Jules would give us good advice."

"Bully for you, Mother!" cried Tom, glad to catch a straw as he saw the shadow on Madge's face lighten. "As soon as I have had a bite of supper with the girls I'll get hold of a boat and go after the captain."

Tom did not have to make his journey up the

bay to "The Anchorage" that night. While he and his mother were at supper with the girls they heard the sound of Captain Jules's voice calling to them over the water. He had to come ashore lower down the bay, where the water was deeper than it was near the houseboat, but he always hallooed as he approached.

"O Jenny Ann!" faltered Madge, trembling like a leaf, "it is our captain. Perhaps he has brought Tania back with him. I—I—hope nothing dreadful has happened to her."

Without a word Tom fled off the houseboat. A moment later he espied Captain Jules coming toward him, alone!

"Halloo, son!" called out Captain Jules cheerfully. "Glad to know that you are down here with the girls. Funny thing, but I've had these girls on my mind all day. It seemed to me that they needed me, and I couldn't go to bed without finding out that everything was well with them. What's wrong?" Captain Jules had caught a fleeting glimpse of Tom's harassed face. "Is it—is it Madge?" he asked anxiously. "Is anything the matter with my girl?"

Tom shook his head reassuringly. It took very few words to make the captain understand that the trouble was over Tania and not Madge.

When, a moment later, the captain went

aboard the "Merry Maid" he was able to smile bravely at the discouraged women.

"Here, here!" he cried gruffly, while Madge clung to one of his horny hands for support and Eleanor to the other, "what is all this nonsense I hear? Tania is not really lost, of course. I'll bet you we find the little witch in no time. She has just gone off somewhere in these New Jersey woods to join the fairies she talks so much about. They are sure to take good care of her. We can't do much more looking for her to-night, but I'll find her first thing in the morning."

Both Captain Jules and Mrs. Curtis insisted that the girls and Miss Jenny Ann go early to bed. Just as Captain Jules was saying good night it occurred to Miss Jenny Ann that she would rather turn over to the old sailor the box of coins and jewelry. While Tania was lost there would be so many persons in and out of the houseboat that Miss Jenny Ann feared something might happen to the valuables.

She went to the drawer in the sideboard in the saloon cabin without thinking of the key under her pillow, and took hold of the knob. To her surprise the drawer opened readily. There was no iron safe inside it. Miss Jenny Ann ran to her bed and felt under her pillow. The key was still there as though it had never been disturbed.

Captain Jules and Tom decided that the simple lock to the houseboat sideboard had been easily broken open. When, or how, or by whom, nobody knew, but it was certain that the jewels and money were gone. Fortune, the fickle jade, who had brought the houseboat girls such good luck only a short time before, had now cruelly stolen it away from them.

CHAPTER XIX

THE WICKED GENII

TANIA had been aroused in the night by seeing a dark figure standing with his back to her only a few feet from her bed. Involuntarily the child stirred. In that instant a black-masked face turned toward her and Tania gave the single, terrified scream that Madge had heard. Before Tania could call out again, a handkerchief was tied so closely around her mouth that she could make no further sound.

A moment later the mysterious, sinister visitor picked the child up in his arms and bore her swiftly and quietly away from the shelter of the houseboat and her beloved friends. The little girl was very slender, yet her abductor staggered as he walked. He had something besides Tania that he was carrying.

About a quarter of a mile from the houseboat Tania was dumped into the rear end of an automobile and covered with a heavy steamer blanket. Then the automobile started off through the night, going faster and faster, it seemed to her, with each hour of darkness that remained.

At times the little prisoner slept. When she

awakened she cried softly to herself, wondering who had stolen away with her and what was now to become of her. But Tania was only a child of the streets and she had been reared in a harder school than other happier children, so she made no effort to cry out or escape. She knew there was no one near to hear her, and the motor car was moving so swiftly that she could not possibly escape from it.

Tania and her unknown companion must have ridden all night. Evidently the driver of the car had not cared about the roads. He had pushed through heavy sand and ploughed over deep holes regardless of his machine. Speed was the only thing he thought of.

By and by the automobile stopped, after a particularly bad piece of traveling. The driver got down, lifted Tania, still wrapped in her blanket, in his arms and carried her inside a house. The child first saw the light in an old room, up several flights of steps, which was drearier and more miserable than anything she had ever beheld in her life in the tenements. It was big and mouldy, and dark with cobwebs swinging like dusty curtains over the windows that had not been washed for years. The windows looked out over a swamp that was thick with old trees.

But Tania saw none of these things when the

blanket was first lifted from her head. She gave a gasp of fright and horror. For the first time she now realized that her captor was her childhood's enemy and evil genius, Philip Holt.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, with a long-drawn sigh that was almost a sob, "it is *you!* Why have you brought me here? What have I done?" Then a look of unearthly wisdom came into Tania's solemn, black eyes. She continued to stare at the young man so silently and gravely that Philip Holt's blonde face twitched with nervousness.

"Didn't you recognize me before?" he asked fiercely. "You were quite likely to shriek out in the night and spoil everything, so I had to carry you off with me, little nuisance that you are! You can just make up your mind, young woman, that you will stay right here in this room until I can take you to that nice institution for bad children that I have been telling you about for such a long time. You'll never see your house-boat friends again."

Tania made no answer, and Philip Holt left her sitting on the floor of the gloomy room wide-eyed and silent.

For three days Tania stayed alone in that cheerless room. She saw no one but an old, half-foolish man who came to her three times a day to bring her food. He gave Tania a few

rough garments to dress herself in and treated the little prisoner kindly, but Tania found it was quite useless to ask the old man questions. She was a wise, silent child, with considerable knowledge of life, and she understood that there was nothing to be gained by talking to her jailer, who would now and then grin foolishly and tell her that she was to be good and everything would soon be all right. Her nice, kind brother was going to take her away to school as soon as he could. The wicked people who had been trying to steal her away from her own brother should never find her if her brother could help it.

So the long nights passed and the longer days, and little Tania would have been very miserable indeed except for her fairies and her dreams. It is never possible to be unhappy all the time, if you own a dream world of your own. Still, Tania found it much harder to pretend things, now that she had tasted real happiness with her houseboat girls, than she had when she lived with old Sal. It wasn't much fun to play at being an enchanted princess when you knew what it was to feel like a really happy little girl. And no one would care to be taken away to the most wonderful castle in fairyland if she had to leave the darling houseboat and Madge and Miss Jenny Ann and the other girls behind.

So all through the daylight Tania sat with her small, pale face pressed against the dirty window pane, waiting for Madge to come and find her. She even hoped that a stranger might walk along close enough to the house for her to call for aid. But a dreary rain set in and all the countryside near Tania's prison house looked desolate. More than anything Tania feared the return of Philip Holt. Once he got hold of her again, she knew he would fulfill his threats.

During this dreadful time Tania had no human companion, but she was not like other children. She was part little girl and the rest of her an elf or a fay. The trees, the birds, and flowers were almost as real to her as human beings. For, until Madge and Eleanor had found her dancing on the New York City street corner, she had never had anybody to be kind to her, or whom she could love.

Just outside Tania's window there was a tall old cedar tree. Its long arms reached quite up to her window sill, and when the wind blew it used to wave her its greetings. Inside the comfortable branches of the tree there was a regular apartment house of birds, the nests rising one above the other to the topmost limbs.

Tania held long conversations with these birds in the mornings and in the late afternoons. She told them all her troubles, and how very much

she would like to get away from the place where she was now staying. However, the birds were great gad-abouts during the day, and Tania could hardly blame them.

There was one fat, fatherly robin that became Tania's particular friend. He used to hop about near her window and nod and chirp to her as though to reassure her. "Your friends will come for you to-day, I am quite sure of it," he used to say, until one day Tania really spoke aloud to him and was startled at the sound of her own voice.

"I don't believe you are a robin at all," she announced. "I just believe you are a nice, fat father of a whole lot of funny little boys and girls. I believe you are enchanted, like me. Oh, dear! I was just beginning to believe that I wasn't a fairy after all but a real little girl with pretty clothes and friends to kiss me good night." Tania sighed. "I suppose I must be a fairy princess after all, for if I was a real little girl no one would have cast another wicked spell over me and shut me up in this dungeon in the woods, which is a whole lot worse than living with old Sal."

Yet playing and pretending, and, worse than anything, waiting, grew very tiresome to Tania. On the morning of the fourth day of her imprisonment Tania awoke with a start. Some-

thing had knocked on her window pane. It was only the old cedar tree, and Tania turned over in bed with a sob. But the tapping went on. She got up and went to her window. Quick as a flash Tania made up her mind to run away. Why had she never thought of it before? It was true, her bedroom door was always locked, but here were the branches of the cedar tree reaching close up to her window. Really, this morning they seemed to speak quite distinctly to Tania:

"Why in the world don't you come to me? I shall hold you quite safe! You can climb down through all my arms to the warm earth and then run away to your friends."

It was just after dawn. The pink sky was showing against the earlier grayness when Tania slipped into her coarse clothes and, like a small elf, crept out of her window into the friendly branches of the old tree. She was silent and swift as a squirrel as she clambered down. But she need not have feared. No one in the lonely country place was awake but the child.

Once on the ground, Tania ran on and on, without thinking where she was going. She only wished to get far away from the dreary house where Philip Holt had hidden her. There was a thick woods about a mile or so from Tania's starting place. No one would find her there.

Once she was through it Tania hoped to find a town, or at least a farm, where she could ask for help. In spite of her queer, unchildlike ways, Tania knew enough to understand that if she could only find some one to telegraph to her friends they would soon come to her.

But the forest through which Tania hoped to pass was a dreadful cedar swamp, and in trying to cross it Tania wandered far into it and found herself hopelessly lost.

CHAPTER XX

A BOW OF SCARLET RIBBON

IN the three days that had passed since the disappearance of Tania from the house-boat everything that was possible had been done to discover her whereabouts.

It never occurred to Tom or to Mrs. Curtis to connect Philip Holt's odd behavior with the lost Tania or the vanished treasure box. True, he had not been seen for the past three days, but Mrs. Curtis had received a note from him the day after his disappearance from her house, saying that he had been unexpectedly called away on very important business so early in the morning that he had not wished to awaken her, but he had left word with the servants and he hoped that they had explained matters to her.

Mrs. Curtis's maids and butler insisted that Mr. Holt had given them no message. They had not seen or heard him go. So, as Mrs. Curtis did not regard Philip Holt's withdrawal as of any importance, she gave very little thought to it.

Madge Morton, however, had a different idea. She laid Tania's disappearance at Philip Holt's door. She, therefore, determined to take Tom

Curtis into her confidence, but to ask him not to betray their suspicions of Philip Holt to Mrs. Curtis until they had better proof of the young man's guilt. Madge had never told even Tom that she had once overheard Philip Holt reveal his real identity, nor how much she had guessed of the young man's true character from Tania's unconscious and frightened reports of him.

Tom at first was indignant with Madge, not because she and the other girls believed that Philip Holt had stolen both their little friend and their new-found wealth, but because she had not sooner shared her suspicion of his mother's guest with him. Tom had never liked Philip, so it was easy for him to think the worst of the goody-goody young man.

Without a word to Mrs. Curtis, Tom and the houseboat girls set to work to trace Philip Holt, believing that once he was overtaken Tania and the stolen treasure would be accounted for.

It was not easy work. Philip Holt had not been a hypocrite all his life without knowing how to play the game of deception. A detective sent to New York City to talk to old Sal had nothing worth while to report. The woman declared positively that Philip was no connection of hers; that she had neither seen nor heard of the young man lately. As for Tania, Sal had truly not set eyes on her from the day that

Madge had taken the little one under her protection.

Philip Holt knew well enough that his mother would be questioned about his disappearance. He believed that Tania had told Madge his true history. So old Sal was prepared with her story when the detective interviewed her. Yet it was curious that the Cape May police were unable to find out in what manner the young man had left the town. Inquiries at the railroad stations, livery stables, and garages gave no clue to him.

The houseboat girls were in despair. Madge neither ate nor slept. She felt particularly responsible for Tania, as the child had been her special charge and protégé. Madge had been deeply grieved when her friend, David Brewster, had been falsely accused of a crime in their previous houseboat holiday, when they had spent a part of their time with Mr. and Mrs. Preston in Virginia; but that sorrow was as nothing to this, for David was almost a grown boy and able to look after himself, while Tania was little more than a baby. When no news came of either Philip Holt or Tania, Madge began to believe that Philip Holt had accomplished his design. He had managed to shut Tania up in some kind of dreadful institution. The little captain did not believe that they would ever find

the child, and was so unhappy over the loss of her Fairy Godmother that she lost her usual power to act.

Phyllis Alden, however, was wide awake and on the alert. She knew that it was not possible for Philip Holt to leave Cape May without some one's assistance. Some one must know how and when he had disappeared. The whole point was to find that person.

Phil thought over the matter for some time. Then she quietly telephoned to Ethel Swann and asked her to arrange something for her. She made an appointment to call on Ethel the same afternoon, and she and Lillian walked over to the Swann cottage together. It seemed strange to Madge that her two friends could have the heart for making calls, but, as there was absolutely nothing for them to do save to wait for news of Tania that did not come, she said nothing save that she did not feel well enough to accompany them.

As Lillian and Phyllis Alden approached the Swann summer cottage they saw that Ethel had with her on the veranda the two young people who had been most unfriendly to them during their stay at Cape May, Roy Dennis and Mabel Farrar.

Roy Dennis got up hurriedly. His face flushed a dull red, and he began backing down the

veranda steps, explaining to Ethel that he must be off at once.

Phyllis Alden was always direct. Before Roy Dennis could get away from her she walked directly up to him, and looking him squarely in the eyes said quietly: "Mr. Dennis, please don't go away before I have a chance to speak to you. It seems absurd to me for us to be such enemies, simply because something happened between us in the beginning of the summer that wasn't very agreeable. I wished to ask you a question, so I asked Ethel to arrange this meeting between us this afternoon."

"What do you wish to ask me?" he returned awkwardly.

Phil plunged directly into her subject. "Weren't you and Philip Holt great friends while he was Mrs. Curtis's guest?" she asked.

Roy Dennis looked uncomfortable. "We were fairly good friends, but not pals," he assured Phil.

"But you, perhaps, know him well enough to have him tell you where he was going when he left Mrs. Curtis's," continued Phil in a calmly assured tone. "Mrs. Curtis has not received a letter from him since he left here, so she does not know just where he is. We girls on the houseboat would also like very much to know what has become of Mr. Holt."

"Why?" demanded Roy Dennis sharply.

Phyllis determined to be perfectly frank. "I will tell you my reason for asking you that question," she began. "You may not know it, but our little friend, Tania, disappeared from Cape May the very same day that Philip Holt left the Cape. We all knew that Mr. Holt had known Tania for a number of years before we met her. He thought that the child ought to be shut up in some kind of an institution, but Miss Morton wished to put the little girl in a school. So it may just be barely possible that Mr. Holt took Tania away without asking leave of any one." Phil made absolutely no reference to the stolen money and jewels in her talk with Roy Dennis. If they could run down Philip Holt and Tania the treasure-box would be disclosed as a matter of course.

Roy Dennis hesitated for barely a second. Then he remarked to Phil, half-admiringly: "You have been frank with me, Miss Alden, and, to tell you the truth, I think it is about time that I be equally frank with you. I have no idea where Philip Holt now is, but I do know something about how he got away from Cape May, and I am beginning to have my suspicions that there might have been something 'shady' in his behavior that I did not think of at the time. Three nights ago, it must have been about

eleven o'clock, I was just about ready for bed when Mr. Holt rang me up and asked to speak to me alone. He said that he had just had bad news and wished to get out of Cape May as soon as possible. He asked me if I would lend him my car so that he could drive to a nearby railroad station where he could get a train that would take him sooner to the place he wished to go. I thought it was rather a strange request and asked him why he didn't borrow Tom Curtis's car? He said that Mrs. Curtis had gone to bed and that he did not like to disturb her. He and Tom had never been friendly, so he did not wish to ask him a favor. Well, I can't say I felt very cheerful at letting Philip Holt have the use of my car, but he said that he would send it back in a few hours and it would be all right. I got it out for him myself and he drove away in it. It didn't come back until this morning, and you never saw such a sight in your life, covered with mud and the tires almost used up."

Phil nodded sympathetically. "Who brought the car back to you?" she asked. "Was it Mr. Holt?"

Roy Dennis shrugged his heavy shoulders. "No, indeed! He sent it back by a chap who wouldn't say a word about himself, Holt, or from which direction he had come."

"Is the man still in town?" asked Phil, her voice trembling, "and would you mind Tom Curtis's asking him some questions? We are so awfully anxious."

Roy Dennis rose quickly. "I believe the fellow is around yet, and I'll get hold of him and take him to Tom at once. I don't think that Philip Holt has had anything to do with the kidnapping of the little girl, but his whole behavior looks pretty funny. We will make the chauffeur chap tell us where Philip Holt was when he turned over my car to him." Roy was off like a flash.

Phyllis and Lillian were making their apologies to Ethel for being obliged to hurry off at once to the houseboat when Mabel Farrar took hold of Phil's hand. Her usually haughty expression had changed to one of the deepest interest. "I am *so* sorry about the little lost girl," she said. "I hope you will soon find her. She is a queer, fascinating little thing. I have watched her all summer, and she certainly can dance. I can't believe that Philip Holt has actually stolen her, yet I don't know. Roy Dennis just told Ethel Swann and me something awfully queer. He says he found a bright scarlet ribbon, like a bow that a child would wear in her hair, in the bottom of his motor car when the chauffeur brought it back to him to-day."

Phil's black eyes flashed. "If I ever needed anything to convince me that Philip Holt stole Tania away from us that would do it," she returned indignantly. "Little Tania slept every night with her hair tied up with a scarlet ribbon so as to keep it out of her eyes. When we find where Philip Holt is we shall find Tania, and if I have any say in the matter he shall answer to the law for what he has done."

CHAPTER XXI

THE RACE FOR LIFE

IT took the united efforts of the Cape May police, Tom Curtis, and Roy Dennis to make the chauffeur who had come back with Roy's car say where he had met Philip Holt, and when Philip had turned over the automobile to him to be brought back to Roy.

The chauffeur was frightened; he finally broke down and told the whole story. Philip Holt had driven from the farmhouse where he left Tania to the nearest village. There he had hired the chauffeur and the man had taken Philip within a few miles of New York. In the course of the ride, Philip had told the automobile driver the same story about Tania that he had told the old man in the tumbled-down farmhouse:

Tania was Philip's sister. He was hiding her from enemies, who wished to steal the child away from him. If anybody inquired about the child or about him the chauffeur was to say nothing. Philip would pay him handsomely for bringing the car back to Cape May.

The reason that Philip Holt had sent back Roy Dennis's automobile was because he knew

that Roy would put detectives on his track if he failed to return it. Besides, it would be far easier for Philip Holt to get away with his precious iron safe if he were free of all other entanglements.

It was nearly midnight before the story that the chauffeur told was clear to Tom Curtis. The man believed that he knew the very house in which Tania was probably concealed. There was no other place like it near the town where the chauffeur lived.

Tom got out his own automobile. The chauffeur would ride with him. They would go directly to the old farmhouse. Tania would be there and all would soon be well.

It was about nine o'clock the next morning when Tom's thundering knock at the rickety farmhouse door brought the foolish old man to open it. As soon as Tom mentioned Tania, the old fellow was alarmed. He was stupid and poor, but Philip Holt's behavior had begun to look strange even to him.

The old farmer was glad to tell Tom Curtis everything he knew. It was all right. Tania was safe upstairs. He would take Tom up at once to see her. He was just on his way up to take Tania her breakfast. Indeed, the old man explained with tears in his eyes, he had not meant to assist in the kidnapping of a child. He

was only a poor, lonely old fellow and he hadn't meant any harm. He had never seen Philip until the moment that the young man appeared at his door in his automobile and asked him to look after his sister for a few days.

The farmer's story was true. Philip Holt had no idea how he could safely dispose of Tania. Quite by accident, as he hurried through the country, he had espied the old house. If Tania could be kept hidden there for a few days he would then be able to decide what he could do with her.

Tom would have liked to bound up the old stairs three steps at a time to Tania's bedroom door. Poor little girl, what she must have suffered in the last three days! But Tom's thought was always for Madge. Before he followed the farmer to Tania's chamber he wrote a telegram which he made the chauffeur take over to the village to send immediately. It read: "All is well with Tania. Come at once." And it was addressed to Madge Morton.

Tom was trembling like a girl with sympathy and compassion when he finally reached little Tania's bedroom door. He wished Madge or his mother were with him. How could he comfort poor Tania for all she had suffered?

Tania's jailer unlocked the door and knocked at it softly. The child did not answer. He

knocked at it again and tried to make his voice friendly. "Come to the door, little one," he entreated. "I know you will be glad to see who it is that has come to take you back to your home."

Still no answer. Tom could endure the waiting no longer, but flung the door wide open. No Tania was to be seen. There was no place to look for her in the empty room, which held only a bed and a single chair. But a window was open and the arm of the old cedar tree still pressed close against the sill. Tom could see that small twigs had been broken off of some of the branches. He guessed at once what had happened. Tania had climbed down this tree and run away. But Tom felt perfectly sure that he would be able to find her before the houseboat party and his mother could arrive.

The houseboat girls and Miss Jenny Ann were overjoyed at Tom's telegram. Mrs. Curtis was with them when the message came. She was perhaps the happiest of them all, although she had never been an especial friend of little Tania's. In the last few days her conscience had pricked her a little and her warm heart had sorrowed over the missing child.

Yet, up to this very moment, Mrs. Curtis did not know the truth about Philip Holt. Just before they started for the train that was to bear them to Tom and Tania Madge told Mrs. Curtis

that Philip had stolen the child from them and that they also believed he had run off with their treasure-chest.

Mrs. Curtis listened very quietly to Madge's story. When the little captain had finished she asked humbly, "Can you ever forgive me, dear? I am an obstinate and spoiled woman. If only I had listened to what you told me about Philip this sorrow would never have come to you. Tom also warned me that I was being deceived in Philip Holt. But I believed you were both prejudiced against him. When we recover Tania I shall try to make up to her the wrong I have done her, if it is ever possible."

During the journey Madge and Mrs. Curtis sat hand in hand. Captain Jules looked after Miss Jenny Ann, Lillian, Phil and Eleanor, although he was almost as excited by Tom's news as they were.

At the country station the chauffeur was waiting to drive Tania's friends to the lonely old farmhouse that the child had thought a dungeon.

Tom and Tania would probably be standing in the front yard when the automobile arrived. They were not there. The old farmer explained that Tom and Tania had gone out together. They would be back in a few minutes. To tell the truth, the man did expect them to appear at any

time. He could not believe that Tania was really lost, although Tom had been searching for her since early morning and it was now about four o'clock in the afternoon.

For two hours the houseboat party waited. The girls walked up and down the rickety farmhouse porch, clinging to Captain Jules. Mrs. Curtis and Miss Jenny Ann remained indoors. At dusk Tom returned. He was alone and could hardly drag one foot after the other, he was so weary and heartsick. To think that after wiring her he had found Tania he must face Madge with the dreadful news that the child was lost again!

Two long, weary days passed without news of the lost Tania. The houseboat party made the old farmhouse their headquarters while conducting the search. At first no one thought to penetrate the cedar swamp where Tania had hidden herself, but the idea finally occurred to Tom Curtis, and on the third morning he and Captain Jules started out.

All that third anxious day the girls searched the immediate neighborhood for Tania. When evening came they gathered sadly in the wretched farmhouse, to await the return of Tom Curtis and the old sea captain.

Madge was lying on a rickety lounge, with her face buried in her hands. Phyllis was sitting

near the door. Mrs. Curtis stood at the window, watching for the return of her son. In a further corner of the room, Miss Jenny Ann, Lillian and Eleanor were talking softly together.

Suddenly each one of the sad women became aware of the captain's presence as his big form darkened the doorway. A ray of light from their single oil lamp shone across his weather-beaten face. Phil saw him most distinctly and read disaster in his glance. With the unselfish thought of others that invariably marks a great nature, she went swiftly across the room and dropped on her knees beside Madge.

Madge sprang from her lounge and stumbled across the room toward the old sailor. Phil kept close beside her.

"Tania!" whispered Madge faintly, for she too had seen the captain's face. "Where is my little Fairy Godmother?"

"We have found Tania, Madge," said Captain Jules gently, "but she is very ill. We found her lying under a tree in the swamp, delirious with fever. She is almost starved, and she is so frail—that——" The old man's voice broke.

"Don't say she is going to die, Captain Jules," implored Mrs. Curtis. "If she does, I shall feel that I am responsible. Surely, some-

thing can be done for her." The proud woman buried her face in her hands.

At that moment Tom entered, bearing in his arms a frail little figure, whose thin hands moved incessantly and whose black eyes were bright with fever.

With a cry of "Tania, dear little Fairy Godmother, you mustn't, you shan't die!" Madge sprang to Tom's side and caught the little, restless hands in hers.

For an instant the black eyes looked recognition. "Madge," Tania said clearly, "he took me away—the Wicked Genii." Her voice trailed off into indistinct muttering.

"She must be rushed to a hospital at once." Captain Jules's calm voice roused the sorrowing friends of little Tania to action.

"I'll have my car at the door in ten minutes," declared Tom huskily. "Make her as comfortable as you can for the journey."

It was in Captain Jules's strong arms that little Tania made the journey to a private sanatorium at Cape May. Madge sat beside the captain, her eyes fixed upon the little, dark head that lay against the captain's broad shoulder. The strong, magnetic touch of the old sailor seemed to quiet the fever-stricken child, and, for the first time since they had found her, Tania lay absolutely still in his arms.

Mrs. Curtis occupied the front seat with her son, who drove his car at a rate of speed that would have caused a traffic officer to hold up his hands in horror. It had been arranged that Tom should return to the farmhouse as soon as possible for the rest of the party.

No one of the occupants of the car ever forgot that ride. Once at the hospital, no time was lost in caring for Tania. The physician in attendance, however, would give them no satisfaction as to Tania's condition beyond the admission that it was very serious. Mrs. Curtis engaged the most expensive room in the hospital for the child, as well as a day and night nurse, and, surrounded by every comfort and the prayers of anxious and loving friends, Tania began her fight for life.

CHAPTER XXII

CAPTAIN JULES LISTENS TO A STORY

TANIA did not die. After a few days the fever left her, but she was so weak and frail that the physician in charge of her case advised Mrs. Curtis to allow her to remain in the sanatorium for at least a month. When she should have sufficiently recovered Mrs. Curtis had decided to take upon herself the responsibility of the child's future. She had been a constant visitor in the sickroom and during the long hours she had spent with the imaginative little one had grown to love her, while Tania in turn adored the stately, white-haired woman and clung to her even as she did to Madge, a fact which pleased Mrs. Curtis more than she would admit.

Philip Holt was discovered hiding in New York City. The treasure-box was in the keeping of old Sal, for Philip had not dared to dispose of the coins or the jewelry while the detectives were on the lookout for him. Tom Curtis saw that the case against Philip Holt was conducted very quietly. The houseboat girls had had enough trouble and excitement. Their treasure was restored to them and they had no

desire ever to hear Philip Holt's name mentioned again.

Tom Curtis was more curious. In questioning Philip, Tom learned that he himself was innocently to blame for Philip's crime. Holt recalled to Tom the fact that, on returning from the houseboat after spending the evening with Captain Jules and his friends, Tom had mentioned to his mother that the precious iron safe was on the houseboat, and that if she cared to look at the old jewelry again Miss Jenny Ann would unlock the sideboard drawer and show it to her the next day. In that moment Philip Holt decided on his theft, but he did not expect Tania to thwart him. He had slipped through one of the open staterooms into the dining room of the houseboat, broken the lock of the sideboard and opened the dining room door from the inside to make his escape. Philip Holt believed that in taking Tania with him he had accomplished his own downfall.

If he had not stopped to leave the child at the deserted farmhouse, his movements would never have been traced.

Madge Morton was a good deal changed by the events of the last few weeks. She was so unlike her usual happy, light-hearted and impetuous self that Miss Jenny Ann and the houseboat girls were worried about her. They ardently

wished that Madge would fly into a temper again just to show she possessed her old spirit. But she was very gentle and quiet and liked to spend a good deal of the time alone.

Miss Jenny Ann consulted with Lillian, Phil and Eleanor. They decided to write to David Brewster to ask him to come to spend a few days with them on the houseboat. Madge was fond of David and the young man had done such fine things for himself in the past year that her friends hoped a sight of him would stir her out of her depression.

David was visiting Mrs. Randolph—"Miss Betsey"—in Hartford. He replied that he would try to come to Cape May in another week or ten days, but please not to mention the fact to Madge until he was more sure of coming.

One bright summer afternoon Madge returned alone from a long motor ride with Mrs. Curtis and Tom. She found the houseboat entirely deserted and remembered that the girls and Miss Jenny Ann had had an engagement to go sailing. She curled up on the big steamer chair and gave herself over to dreams.

A small boat, pulled by a pair of strong arms, came along close to the deck of the "Merry Maid." Madge looked up to see Captain Jules's faithful face beaming at her.

"All alone?" he called out cheerfully. "Come

for a row with me. I'll get you back before tea."

Madge wanted to refuse, but she hardly knew how, so she slipped into the prow of the skiff and sat there idly facing him.

Captain Jules frowned at the girl's pale face, which looked even paler under the loose twists of her soft auburn hair. Madge looked older and more womanly than she had the day the captain first saw her. There was a deeper meaning to the upper curves of her full, red lips and a gentler sweep to the downward droop of her heavy, black lashes. She was fulfilling the promise of the great beauty that was to be hers. It was easy to see that she had the charm that would make her life full of interest.

Still Captain Jules frowned as though the picture of Madge and her future did not please him.

"How much longer are you going to stay at Cape May, Miss Morton?" he inquired.

Madge smiled at him. "I don't know anything about 'Miss Morton's' plans, but Madge expects to be here for about two weeks more."

Recently the captain had been calling the houseboat girls by their first names, as he was with them so constantly in their trouble. But he had now decided that he must return to the formality of the beginning of their acquaintance. It was best to do so.

"And afterward?" the old sailor questioned, pretending that he was really not greatly interested in Madge's reply.

The girl's expression changed. "I don't know," she returned. "Of course, Eleanor and I will go back to 'Forest House' for a while. Aren't you glad that Uncle has been able to pay off the mortgage? When Nellie and Lillian go to Miss Tolliver's and Phil to college I don't know exactly what I shall do. Mrs. Curtis and Tom have asked me to make them a visit in New York next winter."

The captain frowned again. It was well that Madge was looking over the water and not at him, for she never could have told why he looked so displeased.

"You and Tom Curtis are very good friends, aren't you, Madge?" said Captain Jules abruptly.

Madge smiled to herself. She felt as though she were in the witness box. Was her dear old captain trying to cross-examine her?

"Of course, I like Tom better than almost any one else. He is awfully good to me. You know you like Tom yourself, so why shouldn't I?" she ended wickedly.

"I like him. Certainly I do. He is a fine, upright fellow and his money hasn't hurt him a mite, which you can't say of the most of us.

But it's a different matter with you, young lady, and I want you to go slowly."

"But I am not going at all, Captain," laughed Madge. "It seems to me that I want only one thing in the world, and that's to find my father. Sometimes I am afraid that perhaps I shall never find my father after all!"

Captain Jules coughed and his voice sounded rather husky. It had a different note in it from any that Madge had ever heard him use to her.

"Don't play the coward, child," he said sternly; "just because you have had one defeat don't go about the world saying you must give up. It may be that your father did that once and is sorry for it now. Keep up the fight. No matter how many times we may be knocked down in this world, if we have the right sort of courage we'll always get up again."

Madge sat up very straight. Her blue eyes flashed back at Captain Jules with an expression that he liked to see. "I am not going to give up my search," she answered defiantly. "One hears that it is Fate which separates two persons. If I find Father, I shall feel that I have won a victory over Fate. But I can't help longing to tell my father that I know that he is innocent of the fault for which he was disgraced and dismissed from the Navy, and that I have

the proof in my possession that would make it clear to all the world as well as to me."

The old captain gave vent to a sudden exclamation that sounded like a groan. His face looked strangely drawn under his coat of tan.

"Are you sick, Captain Jules?" asked Madge hastily. "Do take my place and let me have the oars. I am sure I can row you."

Captain Jules smiled back at her. "What made you think I was sick?" he asked. "What was that you were telling me? How do you know that your father was guiltless of his fault? Why, Captain Robert Morton was one of the kindest men that ever trod a deck, and yet he was convicted of cruelty to one of his own sailors."

"Captain Jules," continued Madge earnestly, "I would like to tell you the whole story if you have time to listen to it. You know I promised long ago to tell you. Two years ago, when we were on the second of our houseboat excursions, we spent part of our holiday near Old Point Comfort. There I met the man who had been my father's superior officer. Some unpleasant things happened between his granddaughter and me, and she told my father's story at a dinner in order to humiliate me. Long afterward her grandfather heard of what his granddaughter had done and he made a statement before my

friends which cleared my father's name. He confessed to having allowed my father to suffer for something he had commanded him to do. My father was too great a man to clear himself at the expense of his superior officer, so he left the Navy in disgrace and has never been heard of since that dreadful time.

"There isn't much more to tell. Only the old admiral has died since I met him. However, he left a paper that was sent to me, in which he acquits my father of all blame and takes the whole responsibility for my father's act on himself. Must we go back home, Captain Jules?" for, at the end of her speech, Madge observed that the captain had turned his skiff and was rowing directly toward the houseboat. He handed Madge aboard a few moments later with the air of one whose mind is elsewhere.

It was impossible for Miss Jenny Ann to persuade the old pearl diver to remain to supper. With very few words to any of the party he turned Madge over to her friends and rowed hurriedly away toward his home.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE VICTORY OVER FATE

EARLY the next morning word was brought by a small boy that Captain Jules Fontaine wished Miss Madge Morton to come out to "The Anchorage" alone, as he had some important business that he wished to talk over with her.

It was a wonderful morning, all fresh sea breezes and sparkling sunshine. Madge had not felt so gay in a long time as when the other houseboat girls fell to guessing as to why Captain Jules desired her presence at his house.

"He intends to make you his heiress, Madge," insisted Lillian. "Then, when you are an old lady, you can come down here to live in the house with the roof like three sails, and ride around in the captain's rowboat and sailboat and be as happy as a clam."

Madge shook her head. "No such thing, Lillian. I don't believe the captain wants me for anything important. He may be going to lecture me, as he did yesterday afternoon. At any rate, I'll be back before long. Please save some luncheon for me."

Madge was surprised when her boat landed

near "The Anchorage" not to see Captain Jules in his front yard, with his funny pet monkey on his shoulder, waiting to receive her. She began to feel afraid that the captain was ill. She had never been inside his house in all their acquaintance. But Captain Jules had sent for her, so there was nothing for her to do but to march up boldly to his front door and knock.

She lifted the heavy brass knocker, which looked like the head of a dolphin, and gave three brisk blows on the closed door.

At first no one answered. The little captain was beginning to think that the boy who came to her had made some mistake in his message and that Captain Jules had gone out in his fishing boat for the day, when she heard some one coming down the passage to open the door for her.

She gave a little start of surprise. A tall, middle-aged man, with a single streak of white hair through the brown, was gazing at her curiously.

"I would like to see Captain Jules," murmured Madge stupidly, unable to at once recover from the surprise of finding that Captain Jules did not live alone.

The strange man invited Madge into a tiny parlor which rather surprised her. The room was filled with bookshelves, reaching almost up

to the top of the wall. The young girl had never dreamed that her captain was much of a student. The only things that reminded her of Captain Jules were the fishnets that were hung at the windows for curtains and the great sprays of coral and sponge which decorated the mantelpiece.

The man sat down with his back to the light, so that he could look straight into Madge's face.

"Captain Jules will be here after a little, Miss Morton," he said gravely, "but he wished me to have a talk with you first."

Madge looked curiously at the unknown man. She could not obtain a very distinct view of his face, but she saw that he was very distinguished looking, that his eyes seemed quite dark, and that he wore a pointed beard. He did not look like an American. At least, there was something in his appearance that Madge did not quite understand. It struck her that perhaps the man was a lawyer. It could not be that Lillian was right in her guess. The treasure in the iron safe had not yet been sold, so it might be that this man wished to make some offer for it. Whoever he might be the silence was becoming uncomfortable. The little captain decided to break it.

"I wonder if you wish to talk to me about the treasure that we found?" she inquired, smiling.

"I would rather that Captain Jules should be in here when we speak of that."

The stranger shook his head. He had a very beautiful voice that in some way fascinated the girl.

"No, I don't wish to talk about your treasure, but I do wish to speak of something else that was lost and is found again. I don't know that you will value it, child, or that it is worth having, but Captain Jules thinks you might."

Madge's heart began to beat faster. This strange man had something of great importance to tell her. She wondered if she had ever seen him anywhere before. There was something in his look that was oddly familiar. But why did he look at her so strangely and why did not her old friend come to her to end this foolish suspense?

"I have been down here on a visit to Captain Jules a number of times this summer and he has always talked of you," went on the fascinating voice. "I have longed to see you, but—— Miss Morton, Captain Jules Fontaine and I knew your father once, long years ago. The news that you had proof of his innocence made us very happy last night."

Madge would have liked to bounce up and down in her chair, like an impatient child. Only her age restrained her. Why didn't this man

tell her the thing he was trying to say? What made him hesitate so long?

"Yes, yes," she returned impatiently, "but do you know whether my father is alive now? That is the only thing I care about."

Madge gripped both arms of her chair to control herself. She was trembling so that she felt that she must be having a chill, though it was a warm summer day, for the stranger had risen and was coming toward her, his face white and haggard. Then, as he advanced into the brighter light of the room, Madge saw that his eyes were very blue.

"Your father isn't dead," the man replied quietly. "He is here in this very house, and he cares for you more than all the world in spite of his long silence!"

The little captain sprang to her feet, her face flaming. "Captain Jules! *He* is my father? He seemed so old that I didn't realize it. Yet he has said so many things to me that might have made me guess he knew everything in the world about me. Oh, where is he? My own, own Captain Jules?"

The stranger, whose arms had been outstretched toward Madge, let them fall at his sides, but Madge had no eyes for him. Captain Jules had entered the room and she had flung herself straight into his kindly arms.

So, after all, it was Captain Jules Fontaine who had to make it clear to Madge that he was not her father, but her father's lifelong and devoted friend. The captain told Madge the story while he held both her cold hands in his big, rough ones, and the man who was her own father sat watching and waiting for her verdict.

Jules Fontaine had never been captain of anything but a sailing schooner, but he had been a gunner's mate on Captain Robert Morton's ship. He alone knew that Captain Morton had been forced into the fault that he had committed by order of his admiral. When Captain Morton was dismissed from the United States Naval Service Jules Fontaine, gunner's mate, had procured his discharge and followed the fortunes of his captain. The two men drifted south to the tropics. Every American vessel is equipped with a diving outfit, and some of the men are taught to go down under the water to examine the bottoms of the boats. Jules Fontaine liked the business of diving. When the two men found themselves in a strange land, without any occupations, Captain Jules joined his fortunes with the pearl divers and for many years followed their perilous trade.

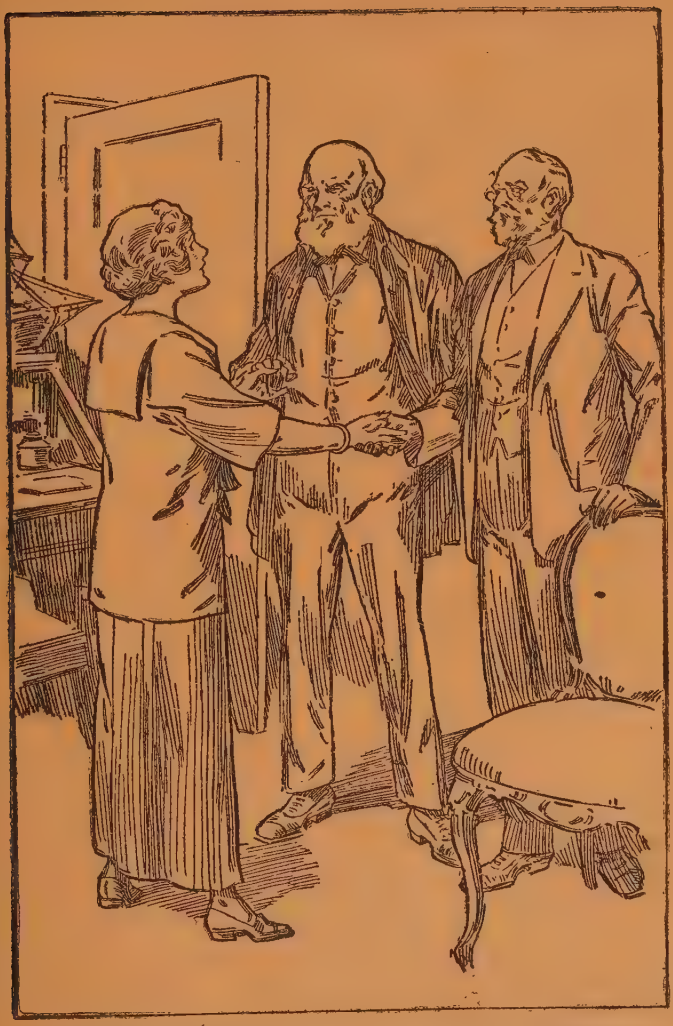
Captain Morton had a harder time to get along, but after a while he studied foreign languages and began to translate books. Five

years before the two men had come back to the United States. Since that time Captain Morton had tried to follow every movement of his daughter. Captain Jules wanted his friend to make himself known to his own people, but Robert Morton feared that they would never forgive his long silence or his early disgrace. He believed that Madge would be happier without knowledge of him. It was her own longing for her father, reported by Captain Jules, that had impelled Robert Morton at last to reveal himself to her.

Madge could not comprehend all of this at once. She did not even try to do so. She realized only that, after being without any parents, she had suddenly come into two fathers at the same time, her own father and Captain Jules, who was her more than foster father.

With a low, glad cry she went swiftly across the room. She did not try to think or to ask questions at that moment about the past, she only flung her young arms about her father's neck in a long embrace, feeling that at last she had some one in the world who was her very own.

While Madge, her father, and Captain Jules were trying to see how they could bear the miracle and shock of their great happiness, a small, dark object darted into the room and



"I am Going to Keep House for You at 'The Anchorage.'"

planted its claws in Madge's hair. It pulled and chattered with all its might.

The little captain laughed with the tears in her eyes. "It's that good-for-nothing monkey!" she exclaimed as she disentangled the creature's tiny hands. Then she kissed her father and afterwards Captain Jules. "Now I know why this monkey is called Madge, and I am sorry to have such a jealous, bad-tempered namesake."

The captain scolded the monkey gently. "Don't you fret about this particular namesake. If you only knew all the others you have had! Every single pet that two lonely old men could get to stay around the house with them we have named for you."

Captain Morton did not go back to the houseboat with his daughter. Madge thought she would rather tell her friends of her great happiness alone. She wouldn't even let Captain Jules escort her. "You'll both have plenty of my society after a while," she argued, "for I am going to come to keep house for you at 'The Anchorage' some day."

Madge rowed slowly back to the "Merry Maid." She was thinking over what she would say to Miss Jennie Ann and the girls. How should she announce to them that her quest was ended, her victory over Fate won?

As she neared the houseboat she saw that her companions were gathered on deck, evidently watching for her. Madge rested on her oars and waved one hand to them. Four hands waved promptly back to her. A moment more and she had come alongside the "Merry Maid." As she clambered on deck she cast a swift upward glance at her friends, who, with one accord, were looking down on her, their faces full of loving concern.

With a little cry of rapture Madge threw herself into Miss Jenny Ann's arms. "O, my dear!" she cried, "I've found him! I've found my father!"

And it was with her faithful mates' arms around her that Madge told the strange story of how her quest had ended in the little sitting room of "The Anchorage."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LITTLE CAPTAIN STARTS ON A JOURNEY

SIX weeks had passed since Madge Morton's discovery of her father, and many things had happened since then. It was now toward the latter part of September, and on a beautiful fall morning one of the busy steamship docks in the lower end of New York City was crowded with a gay company of people. There were four young girls and three young men, a beautiful older woman, with soft, white hair and a look of wonderful distinction; a woman of about twenty-six or seven, with a man by her side, who in some way suggested the calling of the artist; a white-haired old man and an elderly lady, who, in spite of the fact that she answered to the name of Mrs. John Randolph, would have been mistaken anywhere for a New England spinster. Two men were the only other important members of the group One of them was a distinguished-looking man of about fifty-three with a rather sad expression, and the last a bluff old sea captain, whose laugh rang out clear and hearty above the sound of the many voices.

In front of the wharf lay a beautiful steam

yacht, painted pure white and flying a United States flag. The boat was of good size and capable of making many knots an hour, but she looked like a little toy ship alongside the immense ocean-going steamers that were entering and leaving the New York harbor, or waiting their sailing day at their docks.

One of the girls, dressed in a white serge frock and wearing a white felt hat, was walking up and down at the back of the crowd, talking to a young man.

"David, more than almost anything, I believe I appreciate your coming to New York to see me off. It would have been dreadful to go away for a whole year, or maybe longer, without having had a glimpse of you. Who knows what may happen before I am back again?" The girl's eyes looked wistfully about among her friends, although her lips smiled happily.

For a few seconds the young man made no answer. He had never been able to talk very readily, now he seemed to wish to think before he spoke.

"I shall be a man, Madge, before you are back again," he replied slowly. "I am twenty now, so I shall be ready to vote. But, best of all, I shall be through college and ready to go to work." The young man threw back his square shoulders. His black eyes looked serious and

steadfast. "I am going to make you proud of me, Madge. You remember I told you so, that day in the Virginia field, when you helped me out of a scrape and started me on the right road."

The little captain nodded emphatically. "I am proud of you already, David," she declared warmly. "I think it is perfectly wonderful that you have been able to take two years' work in college instead of one, beside helping Mr. Preston on the farm. You are going to make me dreadfully ashamed when I come back, by knowing so much more than I. Phil enters Vassar this fall and Tom will graduate at Columbia in another year. I am going to try to study on the yacht, but I shall be so busy seeing things that I know I won't accomplish very much. Just think, David, I am going around the world in our own boat with my father and Captain Jules! Isn't it wonderful how one's dreams come true and things turn out even better than you expect them to? I believe, if it weren't for leaving my beloved houseboat chums and Mrs. Curtis and Tom, and Miss Jenny Ann and you, I should be the happiest girl in the world."

"I don't suppose I count for much, Madge," answered David honestly, "but I am more grateful to you than you can know for putting me on that list. Some day——" The young man hesitated, then his sober face relaxed and a bril-

liant smile lighted it. "It's pretty early for a fellow like me to be talking about some day, isn't it, Madge?"

Madge laughed, though she blushed a little and answered nothing.

Just then Phyllis Alden and a young man in a lieutenant's uniform joined Madge and David Brewster.

"Lieutenant Jimmy is saying dreadful things, Madge," announced Phil mournfully. "He says he is sure you won't come back home in a year. You'll stay over in Europe until you are grown up or married, or something else, and you'll never be a houseboat girl again!" Phil's voice broke.

Lieutenant Jimmy looked uncomfortable. "See here, Miss Alden," he protested, "I never said anything as bad as all that. I only said that perhaps Captain Morton and Captain Jules would stay longer than a year. Almost any one would, if they owned that jolly little yacht."

"I'll wager you, Lieutenant Jimmy, a torpedo boat full of the same kind of candy that you sent us at the end of our second houseboat holiday, that if you come down to this dock one year from to-day you will see our yacht, which Captain Jules has named 'The Little Captain,' paying her respects to the Statue of Liberty.

Come, let's go and make Father and Captain Jules convince him, Phil," proposed Madge, hugging Phyllis close to her, as if the thought of being parted from her for so long as one year was not to be borne.

"I'll take that wager, Miss Morton," replied Lieutenant Jimmy jokingly, "because I would be so awfully glad to have to pay it."

"Madge simply must come back on time, Lieutenant Jimmy," whispered Phil, nodding her head mysteriously toward a young woman and a man. "It's a state secret, and I ought not to tell you, but Miss Jenny Ann and Mr. Theodore Brown, the artist, are to be married a year from this fall. We must all be at the wedding. Miss Jenny Ann couldn't possibly be married unless every one of the 'Mates of the Merry Maid' were there. If we can arrange it, Miss Jenny Ann is going to be married on the houseboat. Won't it be the greatest fun?"

For the moment Phil was so cheered at the thought of another houseboat reunion, though a whole twelve months off, that she forgot that her best beloved Madge was to leave in another half-hour for her trip around the world.

Phyllis and Lieutenant Jimmy were standing a little behind Madge. David Brewster stopped to talk to Mrs. Curtis and Tom.

At the far end of the dock Captain Jules Fon-

taine was giving some orders to four sailors who formed the entire crew of his new yacht, for the old pearl diver was to pilot his own boat, which was to sail under Captain Morton's orders. The beautiful little yacht was Captain Jules's own property. The old man had made a comfortable fortune in his life in the tropics, but he had little use for it, and no desire, except to make Madge and her father happy. The little captain's love for the water was what endeared her most to the old sailor. He could not be happy away from the sea and he couldn't be happy away from Madge and Captain Morton. The fortunate girl's two fathers had discussed very seriously Madge's own proposal to come to keep house for them at "The Anchorage." Both men knew that she could not settle down at their lonely little house far up the bay and several miles from the nearest town, which was Cape May. Wonderful as the fathers thought Madge, they realized that she was very young and must go on with her education. They could not bear to send her away to college after all the long years of separation. Captain Jules conceived the brilliant idea of educating her by taking her on a trip around the world. The old sailor couldn't have borne being cooped up in liners and on trains with other people to run them. So Madge's dream of a ship all her own,

which was to sail "strange countries for to see," had come true with her other good fortune.

Leaving her friends for a moment, Madge made her way toward the end of the dock to beg Captain Jules to reassure her friends of their return at the end of a year. The captain did not notice her approach. Apparently no one was looking at her.

On the end of the wharf were gathered three or four small street arabs. They had no business on the wharf, which was precisely their reason for being there. They were playing behind a number of large boxes and some other luggage, and, until Madge approached, no one had observed them. They were having a tug-of-war and it was hardly a fair battle. Two good-sized urchins were pulling against one other strong fellow and another small boy, so thin and pale, with such dark hair and big, black eyes that, for the moment, he made Madge think of Tania, who was almost well enough to leave the sanatorium and had sent her Fairy Godmother many loving messages by Mrs. Curtis. Madge stopped for half a minute to watch the boys. In her stateroom were so many boxes of candy she would never be able to eat it all in her trip around the world. If she only had some of them to give this lively little group of youngsters!

Captain Jules was at one side of the wide wharf with his back toward her and the group of boys. His yacht was occupying his entire attention. The street urchins did not realize how near they were to the edge of the dock because of the pile of luggage that surrounded them.

The tug-of-war grew exciting. Madge clapped her hands softly. She had not believed the smallest rascal had so much strength. Suddenly the older lad's grip broke. The boys fell back against a pile of trunks that were set uneasily one above the other. One of the trunks slid into the water and the smallest lad slipped backward after it with an almost noiseless splash. His boy companions stared helplessly after him, too frightened to make a sound.

Of course, Madge might soon have summoned help. She did think of it for a brief instant, for she realized perfectly that her white serge suit would look anything but smart if she plunged into the river in it. Then, too, her friends, Captain Jules, and her father might be displeased with her. But the little lad had given her such an agonized, helpless look of appeal as he struck the water! And his eyes were so like Tania's!

Captain Jules turned around at the sound of feet running down the dock. David Brewster and Tom Curtis were side by side. But they

both looked more surprised than frightened. In the water, a few feet from the dock, Captain Jules espied Madge Morton, her white hat floating off the back of her head, her face and hair dripping with water. She was smiling in a half-apologetic and half-nervous way. In one hand she held a small boy firmly by the collar. "Fish us out, somebody?" she begged. "I am dreadfully sorry to spoil my clothes, but this little wretch would go and fall into the water at the very last moment."

Captain Jules and one of his sailors pulled Madge and the small boy safely onto the wharf again. The captain frowned at her solemnly, while David and Tom laughed.

"How am I ever going to keep her out of the bottom of the sea?" the captain inquired sternly. "I don't know that I care for the rôle of playing guardian to a mermaid."

Madge could see Mrs. Curtis, Miss Jenny Ann, her chums and her father, as well as their other friends, hurrying down toward the end of the dock. She gave one swift glance at them, then she looked ruefully at her own dripping garments. Tom and David long remembered her as they saw her at that moment. Her white dress clung to her slender form; the water was dripping from her clothing, her cheeks were a brilliant crimson from embarrassment at her

plight; her red-brown hair glinted in the bright sunlight, and her blue eyes sparkled with mischief and dismay. Before any one had a chance to scold or to reproach her, she had dashed across the wharf, run aboard the yacht and had shut herself up in her stateroom.

A few minutes later, dressed in a fresh white serge frock, she emerged to say good-bye. The houseboat girls had made up their minds that not one tear would any one of them shed when the moment of parting came. Lillian and Phil stood on either side of Eleanor, for neither of them had much faith that Nellie could keep her word when it came to the test.

Madge went first to Mr. and Mrs. John Randolph. "Miss Betsey" took both her hands and held them gravely. "Madge, dear, remember I have always told you that wherever you were exciting things were sure to happen. You have convinced me of it again to-day. Now, you are going around the world and I hope you will see and know only the best there is in it. Good-bye." Miss Betsey leaned on her distinguished old husband's arm for support and surreptitiously wiped her eyes.

"Jenny Ann Jones, you promised I wouldn't have to say good-bye to you," protested Madge chokingly. Miss Jenny Ann nodded, while Mr. Theodore Brown gazed at her comfortingly.

Madge rallied her courage and smiled at both of them. "Do you remember, Jenny Ann," she questioned, "how on the very first of our house-boat trips you said that you would marry some day, just to be able to get rid of the name of 'Jones'? I am sure you will like 'Brown' a whole lot better." Madge turned saucily away to hide the trembling of her lips.

Mrs. Curtis said nothing. She just kissed Madge's forehead, both rosy cheeks and once on her red lips. But when the little captain left her, and Mrs. Curtis turned to find her son standing near her, his face white and his lips set, his mother faltered brokenly: "I am trying hard not to be selfish, Tom, and I am glad, with all my heart, that Madge found her father, but no one will ever know how sorry I am not to have her for my daughter."

"Maybe you will some day, after all, Mother," returned Tom steadily. "We are young, I know, and neither of us has seen much of the world. Still, I am fairly sure I know my own mind. Perhaps Madge will care as much as I do now when the right time comes."

At the last, Madge could not say farewell to her three chums. Her eyes were so full of tears that Captain Jules had to lead her aboard the yacht. She stood on the deck, kissing both hands to them as long as she could see them,

until their little boat had been towed far out into the great New York harbor.

Madge's father stood by her, watching the sunlight dance upon the water.

"My little girl," Captain Morton began, with a view of distracting her attention from the sorrow of parting, "I have always forgotten to tell you that I saw you graduate at Miss Tolliver's. Jules was not with me that day. He knew of you but never saw you until you went to Cape May. I wonder I didn't betray myself to you then, dear. It was I who first called out to you when I saw that arch tottering over your head."

Madge nodded. "I know it now," she replied. "I must have caught a brief glimpse of your face. You and Captain Jules sent me the wonderful pearl. We never could guess from whom it had come."

"Yes," answered Captain Morton, "Jules and I had kept it for you for many years. We determined that sooner or later you should have it. I shall never forget the day when Jules came hurrying into 'The Anchorage' with the news that he had seen you and talked with you about me. He was sure that you were our Madge even before he knew your name to be Morton. It was wonderful to hear that your dearest wish was to find me."

Madge slipped her arm into that of her father

and laid her curly head against his shoulder. "If it was Fate that separated us, then I shall never be dismayed by it again, for love and determination are far greater and through them I found you," she declared softly.

"I am afraid I am very selfish to take you away for a whole year from Mrs. Curtis and Tom and the houseboat girls," said her father, almost wistfully. "You are not sorry you are going to spend the next few months with no one but two old men for company?"

"But I spent eighteen years without you," reminded Madge. "Don't you believe I ought to begin to make up for lost time? Just think," —her eyes grew tender with the pride of possession—"I have what I've longed for more than anything else in the world, my father's love. Perhaps when we come back next year we can anchor the 'Little Captain' in Pleasure Bay and invite the 'Merry Maid' and her crew to visit us. Then Miss Jenny Ann could be married on the houseboat. We must be very sure to come home on time if we carry out that plan."

"Aye, aye, Captain Madge," smiled her father, "unless our good ship fails us we'll anchor next September in Pleasure Bay and send a special invitation to the crew of the 'Merry Maid' to meet us there."

THE END.